THE ROSES OF CREIN

BERYL SYMONS

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BY

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The ROSES *of* CREIN

CHAPTER I

BENEATH the sunshine of a morning late in May in the year of grace 1208, a knight went riding through the grass-covered ways—called streets—of Paris.

Count Bertrand of Crein, one of the doughtiest knights in all Provence, rode gayly toward the Porte St. Denis, which opened the city wall upon the northern road. He was named after that famous troubadour soldier, Bertrand de Born, who dared almost single-handed to brave the power of Richard I. of England, and was his successful rival in the affections of the beautiful Maenz de Montagnac.

A scarlet plume waved from Count Bertrand's helmet, and a surcoat of yellow silk, embroidered with three red roses, covered his plain black mail. Across his breast went a baldrick of scarlet silk, bearing the legend of his house, *"Crein ne rien crain—je maintiens,"* while his shield carried the blazon thereof. A long dagger hung from the ring or mammel at his chest, and his sword was straight, with a short, recurved guard and rounded pommel. In figure he rode tall and upright, broad in the shoulder, narrow in the flank. The helmet shrouded his face, but the opened visor gave a glimpse of two bright blue eyes, with lines about them that

hinted at maturity, of a tanned face, strong nose, and high cheek bones. He wore a mustache, but the mouth and chin were hidden by the upward sweep of the helmet.

The noble black horse picked his way daintily through the defilement of the streets. Swifter progress was hindered by the people thronging around. Hawkers, beggars, monks, nuns, swaggering soldiers, hunger-pinched students, brazen women, barred every step, but at last he won through, and pulled rein at the Porte St. Denis.

The sun hung due south in the blue sky, and the road into the country beyond looked deserted. Such little traffic as existed passed in the early dawn, and again an hour before curfew. Peasant proprietors of tiny holdings beyond the walls rose early to bring their produce safely to the markets before robbers waked to swoop upon them. It was always a chance for the farmer or the shepherd whether he reached Paris in the morning with his goods, and returned in the evening to his poor hut with their price in his pocket. The nobles had their claim upon the good things of life, and what was one dead serf more or less upon the highway, when his overlord lacked mutton for his larder, or money to purchase a new velvet surcoat for his back?

The cavalier uttered a shout, and a soldier in the uniform of the king's bodyguard came to the low, arched doorway of the watch-tower. Perceiving the golden spurs twinkling at the stranger's heels, he drew himself up and saluted.

"Good morning, friend," quoth the rider. "And will you direct me to the Hospital of The Trinity?"

The man stared. Such a greeting from a knight had never before come his way. But then the soft, guttural accents of the rich voice and the prolonging of the letter "r" betrayed the foreigner.

"It lies beyond, two miles down the road," he said at last.

"To the north? A cold road, friend. Salvation lies southward."

Bertrand nodded and rode forward. The soldier hesitated with that word "friend" ringing oddly in his head. Suddenly he ran out through the gateway.

"My lord, my lord!"

The other looked round, scarcely drew rein.

"What?" he flung over his shoulder.

"Have a care, lord. The men of Verlay are out."

He panted as he ran beside the trotting horse. The latter checked, and the soldier halted, breathing heavily, and wiping the sweat from his brow.

"The men of Verlay are out!" repeated Bertrand. "And who may they be, that you risk an apoplexy to give me the news?"

"'Tis the followers of my lord of Verlay. The castle lies a league upon the road, close by the Leper House. Look to yourself, sir knight—the hounds of hell are not so bloody in their hunger."

He saluted again, turned, and sped back to the guard-house.

"A fight!" Bertrand licked his lips. "Allah put up a good one," and he laughed aloud, and rode on with a joyous face indeed.

For battle was so much the breath of life to Bertrand of Crein that men said the spirit of Bertrand de Born, dead in the monastery of Citeaux, lived again in this younger man, who had learned his fighting from him.

The road here was only a rough track, bordered by copses of trees, with intervals of brown ploughed fields, and when he had gone a mile the monastery came in

sight, jutting peninsula-wise upon the road, which, forking at the point, ran east and west on either side of the building.

The walls towered high and massive, raised in great strength against the marauders of internecine warfare. Many and bitter were the cries of the clergy against the spoiler. The French noble pillaged where he could, and the monastic orders, finding anathema and interdict of no avail, learned how to fortify their dwellings, and how to fight in their defense.

Count Bertrand could not distinguish any entrance, and reined in, uncertain which road to pursue. A few mean huts clustered upon the grass at the edge of the road running west, and upon some of the thresholds were men clad in the poorest and coarsest of garments. They eyed the stranger with sullen curiosity, but their interest was palpably riveted to something farther afield. One and all—after that brief glance—turned their eyes down the road and kept them there, as people who looked for salvation—or damnation.

On the opposite side, built within the very shadow of the monastery wall, stood a superior dwelling of stone. Its one long story looked snug and trim, and it was equipped with a stout wooden door, which at that moment hung open. A man, decently dressed in good gray cloth, stood before it. His back was toward the knight, and he also peered long and earnestly into the country beyond the monastery. As the former touched him on the shoulder he swung round violently, a mighty oath dropping from his lips.

"No offense, sir," said the other. "I only seek my way."

"There be many who'd know theirs, and see to walk in it," rejoined the man, recovering himself. "But I did

not hear you approach, sir, and in truth I looked for other visitors."

"The men of Verlay?" hazarded the knight.

The man glared suspiciously. "You are a stranger, sir knight. What do you know of Verlay and his devils?"

"That they are out and—save us, what ails the man?" for he had uttered a despairing cry, and scuttling into his house slammed the massive door. The sound of heavy bolts grinding into their sockets followed, and, although the knight shouted until he was hoarse, the stone house gave no further sign of life.

"An unmannerly churl, but I have no time to read him a lesson," he reflected. "Let me try fortune with the sad-faced villain yonder. By my soul, such a visage should bring his neck unerring to the gallows."

He crossed the road to one of the wooden huts where also a man stood at his door. He had been watching the other two, and listening to the shouts uttered by the knight, but in a dull apathetic fashion, with as little interest as he watched the afternoon shadows fall athwart the ground at his feet. As Bertrand drew rein before his hovel, he stirred a little, and cringed in a fierce manner that suggested the attitude of a but partly-tamed beast.

Bertrand, fretted by delay and the rudeness of the first man, addressed him imperiously enough, demanding guidance to the door of the monastery, and news of a troop of ten horsemen, who, he said, were to meet him thereabouts. The man answered in sullen tones that the door lay a hundred yards round the bend of the right hand road, and that a body of soldiers had passed down it half-an-hour since.

Bertrand cast a swift, keen glance along the two tracks.

"Where does this left road lead, knave?"

"To Verlay—lord."

The title seemed to burn his lips. Bertrand, who had gathered up his reins, dropped his hand again, and paused, looking more carefully at this new acquaintance. He was clothed—or rather partially covered with brown rags. Tattered skins hung about his nether limbs. His legs from the knee downward and his feet were bare. A rope girdle bound his waist, holding a formidable looking knife to his side. His eyes were almost hidden by the matted hair falling into them from above, and by the coarse beard on his cheeks rising to them from beneath. Lowering, forbidding, grimed with neglect, his was a most unprepossessing personality, yet notwithstanding, some suggestion of hidden force emanated from him and interested the soldier.

"The men of Verlay are out, and the men of the Trinity are in," he laughed, nodding toward the stone house.

"Well," muttered the other, "'tis hard to see the deniers thieved, and when Verlay comes out *à la proie,* it leaves dry bones behind. Maître Drapon does good business with the northern traders in cloth and wool."

"And Verlay goes well garbed at his expense. Why does he not trade within the shelter of the Clos?"

"The monks ask too high a rent. He must take the risk."

A look of disgust crossed the other's face.

"Have the citizens of Paris no rights? Why, friend, our good Raymond himself, Count of Toulouse, overlord of more land than your King of France, would not dare borrow—mark the word—so much as a miserable denier

from the people of his capital without giving them sufficient guarantee of its return."

A gleam of wonder lit the peasant's heavy scowl.

"You speak of paradise to come, lord," he said eagerly. Then the light faded. "If I burn for it, I'll not believe that foul monkish lie," he added savagely.

"Tut, man, I speak of the heaven on earth lying south of the Loire, and the sooner I regain it the better."

Once more he would have departed. This time the man stopped him, with a daring hand clutching his rein.

"How now, knave?" He checked at the sight of the face upturned, not understanding that his words had brought into this man's heart the first flicker of hope which had ever touched it. The novelty bewildered a mind so long immersed in black despair. The grimy countenance shone transfigured.

"It is a jest. The great must have their jest. The overlord of Provence to render account to his citizens!" He burst into a string of oaths, then stared again stupidly at the knight.

"Will you swear it, lord, by your knighthood?"

"By my knighthood it is true."

"Then if your worship would take me with him to heaven! I—I vomit hell."

The richly dressed knight of Provence, looking into the eyes of Bûchon, the wood-cutter, caught a glimpse of a human soul struggling upward from a gulf of black ignorance and hopeless misery for perhaps the first time in its existence. The sight troubled and consequently vexed him, for he did not deal with souls. He dealt with brawn and muscle, with hunger satisfied and thirst appeased, with blows given and returned in the joy of warfare, with love and light and mirth, with freedom and sunshine, in short with every material and mental

contrast to this poor foul specimen of manhood who asked for heaven and vomited hell.

But had his generosity not been touched, he had not been vexed, for indifference ever remains unmoved. He cast a keen glance over this supplicant for such divine favors as were to be found south of the Loire. A spare, attenuated frame, yet the muscles showed well on the bare arms. The shoulders were broad, and good living would nerve them to formidable power, or he was no judge of what a man should be.

"Who and what are you?" he said at last.

"Bûchon, the faggot-hewer, on the fief of Verlay," came the eager answer.

"Are you serf or freedman?"

"Serf, lord."

"Who is your overlord?"

"Rodolphe of Verlay."

The age was liberal in some senses. This lord from the south had as little scruple to steal a fighting man from his neighbor as to take a chicken from his hen-roost.

"But hark ye, friend, if he finds you again, it will go hard with you, and you must prove yourself before I fight to hold you."

The man nodded. Speech did not come easily to him and his kind. But already he held himself more erect.

"At your service, lord."

"At once? Do you leave your Lares and Penates so lightly?"

"Lord?"

"Your household gods, Bûchon? No wife, no chick nor child?"

Then he saw a dreadful sight. He witnessed a soul descend into the lowest and blackest depths of hell.

This knight was a byword for courage at the court of Toulouse and beyond, but he covered his eyes then, and shrank back from the horror which his words had conjured into a human face.

When he looked again the tortured eyes were quiet, but Bûchon shook as if with ague.

"Nor wife nor child, lord." The words clattered against his teeth, and the sweat poured from his brow.

Bertrand eyed him curiously. A long road lay between the griefs of the poor and the sympathy of the great, but something in this slave's manner faintly touched his wonder.

"The dog smoulders embers of hell, yet can hide them under the ashes of necessity. Now if his muscles equal his will in strength, I have stolen a man indeed this day."

He pricked his horse forward.

"*En avant!* My men wait yonder. You shall ride back into Paris with them before Sir Rodolphe can miss you."

Yet once again Bûchon stayed him, pointing to a cloud of dust that came swirling down upon them from the north.

"The road is shut," said he. "The men of Verlay are out."

CHAPTER II

HE repeated the words in a loud shout, which brought people from their hovels in swarms. Women with infants at the breast, men carrying children too small to run, older children panting beside them, they sped silently as hunted animals speed.

Bertrand caught a fleeting vision of terror and despair as they swept past him, then they were hidden from view by the turn of the monastery wall. Three minutes later the sanctuary bell began to ring its warning. The knight looked at Bûchon.

"Do you not seek sanctuary, knave?"

"I bide with my lord."

"Then stand firm, for by my lord, here rides hell let loose."

He drew back in a space between two huts, Bûchon standing beside him. His eyes shone brightly and his fingers clutched his sword hilt. The quarrel was none of his at present, but he prayed ardently for a swift opportunity to assume it.

In the meantime the men of Verlay were out indeed. They swept up the road in a whirlwind which broke about the monastery walls. All happened with incredible swiftness. One moment the road had been empty and peaceful under the spring sunshine; now it was filled with men and horses, and the air rent with shouts. Through the clouds of dust raised by the plunging horses

one caught a gleam of steel, a glimpse of fierce eyes glaring between a visor's bars. Blows thundered upon the crazy wooden huts, hoarse cries urged the robbers to their work. One cry shriller than the rest seemed in a woman's voice, but it was hard to be sure in that inferno of noise. Through the din came the sound of fierce, quick imprecations as the men gathered hungrily about the stone house of the cloth merchant. The solid building showed a brave face to the assault—the door refused to yield. Men dismounted from their excited horses, ran hither and thither obeying orders from a deep-throated leader, who, clad in armor of copper hue, loomed ghost-like in the fog of the dust. They crowded into Bûchon's hut, whence came a heavy crashing, tearing sound. Swiftly they reappeared, carrying the ponderous beam which had supported the roof. A dozen pair of hands gripped it, swung it back and launched it at the resisting door. Once, twice, three times. The heavy panels cracked, split open. Axes did the rest.

The knight from Provence frowned, uncertain. Master Drapon was of the common herd, and nobility had its rights; yet in Provence gentlemen succored the oppressed when not personally concerned in their oppression.

But even as he hesitated, a fresh shout arose, followed by that very dreadful sound of a man's scream—not a deep cry, be it understood, but the shrill squealing among the upper notes of a masculine voice which tells of manhood failing in the grip of fear and pain. The sound is a degradation, and the frown deepened on the Provençal's face. He rode forward a step or two, the faggot-hewer keeping pace, then checked again.

That horrible screech seemed to have been the climax of the fray. Now the shouting sensibly diminished, movements became less frenzied, and as the dust-clouds

subsided an ominous scene revealed itself where but a few moments since peace had reigned undisturbed. A score of men-at-arms, mounted and dismounted, occupied the road. The miserable wooden huts were battered ruins—such poor, rude household goods as they possessed lying in heaps before their broken doors. Nothing much truly—a wooden stool, a leathern drinking mug, an earthen crock—the poor of France were not overburdened with furniture in the thirteenth century—but such as they were, they had been treasures to their owners. The stone house, however, had yielded richer spoils. Bales of cloth and silk, heavy rolls of tapestry, gleaming tissues of gold and silver, were scattered in the dust. A length of scarlet velvet lay like a stream of blood upon the white road. Man after man staggered laden from the shop and added his burden to the pile, until the place fairly glowed with color, scarlet and gold, green and silver, blue and purple. It was a rich haul, and the men of Verlay licked their lips, looking expectantly at their leader, who sat all this while upon his great roan horse, watching their work.

At last two men emerged, bearing a small wooden coffer. It was of massive design, and heavily bound with iron clamps. The man on the road spurred forward and held up his hand. His followers instantly became silent. Bertrand listened curiously. He was behind the other, and it seemed that so far his presence had gone unnoticed in the fierce rush of the attack.

"To those whom it may concern," boomed the deep voice, "take notice that I do possess myself of such goods and wealth as have been found to-day, in the name of—Rodolphe de Verlay."

A roar of laughter greeted the words.

"Let any man touch them at his peril," he continued. "Here, Dricard, does aught remain?"

The man addressed disappeared into the hut, reappearing almost at once with a gruesome burden, which he flung before his master's horse. The animal shied away, but Rodolphe of Verlay only laughed when he saw the limp, gray figure with the dagger in its throat.

This *Chevalier De La Proie* had done his work thoroughly that day, and Maitre Drapon was forever released from anxiety concerning his merchandise.

Rodolphe shouted fresh orders. Men sprang forward and began heaping the spoil upon a rough cart, which presently twenty of them should draw to Verlay. The treasure chest would go under the lord's personal escort. That lord, turning suddenly to give further commands, became aware for the first time of the presence of the cavalier from the south. He stared agape. Bertrand bowed courteously.

Rodolphe's startled eyes traveled from him to Bûchon. He had raised his visor, and at sight of the peasant, his forbidding face became yet more ferocious.

"Your presence is unsought, sir stranger," said he with meaning.

"If it trouble you, I apologize," said Bertrand, not moving.

Rodolphe threw a quick glance at the treasures he had thieved.

"The fief is mine. I maintain the rights."

"I'll not dispute them. In Provence we hold him a brave man who dares to be a coward."

"Coward! The word stinks, sir stranger."

"Such a force of armed men against a few poor slaves, against one poor trader! You are a coward, Rodolphe of Verlay, ergo, a brave man," and he threw

his gauntlet onto the ground before him. Sieur Rodolphe looked from the glove to the man who had thrown it.

"In what have I wronged you, a stranger, that you thrust this quarrel upon me?" he asked.

But before the southerner could answer a strange interruption occurred. When the assault commenced a small body of the men had ridden aside onto the grass behind the huts. Here they remained, passive spectators of the scene until this moment, when suddenly a movement broke their ranks, and a horse came galloping toward the knight from Provence. A woman sat sideways on his back, maintaining her position with difficulty, one hand gripping the high peak of the saddle, the other clutching the reins. De Verlay's men thundered up in pursuit, but she, with great coolness and skill, rode between the black horse and the hut flanking him, so that no one could come at her, save over Count Bertrand.

"I crave your aid, sir knight. For the love of heaven and your own honor, save me from this man," and she pointed at Verlay.

Her voice rang with command rather than entreaty. It certainly betrayed no fear. Her red silk dress looked disordered, and the hood of her cloak had fallen back from her face. Bertrand obtained a swift impression of great beauty as he bent to the saddle-bow. Straightening again, he swung out his sword.

"*Christus laudamus te,*" he exulted. "Here is your wrong toward me, Rodolphe of Verlay."

"You vaunting fool, put up your sword," cried Verlay. "This woman is my property. Do you think to tear her from twenty men?"

"I never think about the men I fight," quoth the other gaily. "They think about me, and it gives them

enough to do. Ha, ha, for the clash of the weapons, for the clang of the armor, for the thunder of horses' feet, the shout of a brave man's cry, the whirl of the sword, the rush, the meeting, the shock, the rip of the steel six inches deep into a man's throat! oh, to fight and fight and again to fight!"

He whirled his sword round his head, then, catching sight of Verlay's bewildered face, dropped his arm and burst into laughter.

"'Tis my *sirvente*,[1] sir knight. The music of war fires my veins. I am at your service, sir. Bid your men draw aside."

The laws of chivalry were clearly defined. Rodolphe was bound to single combat. Had he set his men upon his adversary his knightly escutcheon would have been forever soiled. He looked irresolutely from the woman to the knight, whose eyes shone with the lust of battle.

"Why will you rob me of my own?" he said at last. "Go your way in peace, and let me go mine. This woman is my promised wife."

"Who would seem to have repented of her promise."

"He lies," said the lady in the same clear, steady voice. "I am a stranger from England, journeying to Languedoc, and have never seen or heard of him until an hour since. I am lodging at the Trinity and had ventured out to enjoy the sunshine. He came upon me and my tirewoman with her child, picking flowers in the hedges. We were ruthlessly seized. They placed me upon this horse, but what became of Enid and her Margot, I cannot say."

"Then who may these be, madam, running towards us?" asked Bertrand.

A woman and child had darted from one of the huts

[1] The *sirvente* was the troubadour's war song.

and came speeding in their direction, hotly pursued by two of Verlay's men. The woman stumbled and fell, and one of the men stopped and jerked her roughly to her feet. The child ran on, bravely enough, with her golden curls streaming behind her. She moved swiftly for her seven years, but the pursuer was hard upon her, with his hand clawing almost upon her bright hair. The breath sobbed through her rosy lips, terror blinded her eyes, and she ran unseeing straight to Bûchon with chubby, baby arms uplifted.

"Save me, kind sir," she cried. "They said I should be given to the Turks."

He bent, and, catching her in his arms, swung her up on the saddle before the lady. She clasped the little trembling figure tightly, while Verlay, flaming with rage, urged his horse forward and struck Bûchon on the face with his mailed fist.

"You rebellious dog!" he stormed. "Will you thwart your owner?"

Bûchon shook aside the blood trickling from his forehead into his eyes. Such eyes! Those who saw them never forgot the sight.

"You shall not have her, not if you cut me in a thousand pieces, you hound of hell," he said.

The soldiers gasped. Verlay sat in paralyzed astonishment, staring at the work of his hands. For in that moment the faggot-hewer sloughed even such miserable humanity as had clothed him, and in its stead appeared in the incarnation of blackest evil engendered in the depths of the pit wherein Rodolphe of Verlay had cast his soul. Now the baron no longer perceived the man, his chattel, but that same soul, foul, slime-covered with suffering, with hate and thirst of vengeance. The vision was not pleasant. Even he, the overlord, and clad in

his shining copper armor, bestriding the great roan war-horse, he who possessed the right of life and death over every human being on his fief, shrank away, and seemed to cower before the rough, coarse voice which proclaimed his sins.

Bûchon spoke with no flow of eloquence, but in the stilted, untutored fashion of a man little used to speech; yet the halting phrases bit, and rasped the truth against the face of things with far greater force than any cunning twist of expression or flowery dressing of words could have given.

"You took my wife—I stood in the night at the foot of the keep and heard her screams. Afterward you put her out, soiled and broken, and she died in the ditch by the roadside. I found her there, dead." He looked up then at Bertrand of Crein.

"She was my wife," he explained.

The other nodded. The lady was listening intently. Nearby, in the grasp of Verlay's men, stood little Margot's mother, her face pinched with terror.

"I buried her, and our child wept beside me as I dug the grave. She was ten years old—blue eyes—golden curls—they always called her beautiful—like her mother."

He paused and bent his head. The muscles on his neck and shoulders swelled as if carrying a physical burden. No one disturbed that silence. The freebooters looked at each other, perhaps remembering their own wives and children. Rodolphe of Verlay sat motionless on his horse. It is possible that the weight of horror on the peasant's soul numbed his own for the moment and chained action.

Overhead the sun shone, the birds sang merrily. In the distance a cloud of dust came moving toward them from Paris.

Bûchon looked up again, this time at Verlay. A curious sound ran through the little group, as of a breath checked in its passage between the lips. It was no face those men and women stared upon, but the mirror of all the grief and sorrow and impotence in the world; and then again the sickness of a soul which understands how futile is rebellion against the millstone which has ground it. The integral parts being scattered, what revolt can breathe life and shape anew into the powdered dust?

"The earth had not covered her face, when you came riding by, Verlay. Do you remember the foul name you flung at her, and how your men jeered at my shame? Then you took the child—my Blanche. The white flower of Verlay—men named her. You snatched her to your saddle. My child—she had golden hair and blue eyes—and I saw her no more, for you sold her to the Saracens—and you had killed my wife."

The bald tale was told, and let him who will, judge between the seigneur typifying the barbarism of the age and the peasant voicing its misery. Some may deem them both helpless puppets of the law governing the world's progress—the outward signs of an impersonal chaos struggling into form and order. In this case there might be pity as well as blame even for such as Rodolphe of Verlay.

But few men of their day troubled about psychological cause and effect. Certainly not Bûchon, the hewer of faggots. He only dealt with hard facts as they presented themselves. He knew that Sieur de Verlay had killed his wife and stolen his child, knew, too, that the cup of his suffering overflowed, and that reason was going out upon the stream.

As if the recital of his wrongs had stung him to sudden

madness, he whipped out his knife and sprang upon his enemy. At the same moment Verlay shook off the spell of that strange lethargy and called to his men. They closed round him, but dared not strike, since Bûchon had leaped upon the roan horse, and, twining his arms about Verlay, sought an entrance for his weapon in the joints of his armor. The horse was rearing and plunging unchecked, for Verlay had dropped both reins to get a firmer grip round his assailant's body, trying to press the life out of him in the hug of his formidable arms. In the confusion men forgot the two women and the child. Enid ran to the lady's side and would have taken Margot, but that Bertrand drew her back.

"Keep the child, lady, and ride with all swiftness to the postern of the monastery. There you should find ten men-at-arms who had orders to await my coming. Now bid them hasten here to the succor of *'Rose et ma mie.'*"

She started slightly, hesitated, but apparently feeling that time lacked for questions, obeyed his directions with as prompt obedience as a disciplined soldier.

For a bare second he watched the slim figure swaying to the gallop of the horse, then turned to Enid.

"Follow, woman. I can promise to hold them back until you and the child are safe."

"The saints preserve you, lord," she gasped, and in her turn fled to sanctuary.

CHAPTER III

MEANWHILE Bûchon, the faggot-hewer, fared badly with the men of Verlay. They had succeeded in tearing him from their leader and had pinned him to the ground. Verlay remained mounted, breathing heavily. Beside him stood his sergeant, Dricard, holding Bûchon's great knife.

"The right hand and left foot," panted the seigneur. "Then bring him to the castle, and summon every serf and hind on the domain to witness the manner of his death who has dared to raise a hand against his lord."

Dricard advanced to obey the barbarous order, but Bertrand rode between him and his intended victim, rode, moreover, with such swiftness and precision that the men holding Bûchon leaped aside to avoid being trampled upon, and he was free. He rose up behind the black arab, while his protector called upon Verlay to hold off his men.

But the chain of circumstances had inflamed the latter beyond all considerations of chivalric law. This stranger had robbed him of his prisoners, had witnessed the indelible shame of a common dog's assault upon him, a noble, and now purposed to prevent the punishment due, purposed to let the hound live to boast of how he had slain the lord of Verlay but for the aid of his men.

"Now yield my serf, you southern thief," he shouted, "or by the——" he used a dreadful adjuration, "your body shall rot upon my castle walls."

"Ah!" It was a long drawn breath of delight. "Get behind, Bûchon, yet give room for Black King's heels. Now, Red Rodolphe, come and fetch your man."

Rodolphe and his men dashed forward swearing and shouting, but before they could reach Bertrand, he had wheeled and ridden swiftly back to where the road narrowed to a width of barely six feet between the monastery wall and the last hovel. Here he turned and none could get within striking distance save the foremost, who was Rodolphe himself.

"*Mieux vaut un mort qu'un vivant vaincu,*" sang the Provençal, and upon the last note dealt Verlay a blow which made him reel in the saddle. He came on again, however, pluckily enough, at the same time shouting to his men to flank the huts, and attack from behind. Which order obeying, they met Bûchon armed with no likelier weapons than such of Maître Drapon's merchandise as still enriched the roadway. He stood a solitary figure, strangely draped in scarlet cloth, but when the horsemen charged down upon him unthinking in their zeal, he flung wide his drapery. It whirled in sinuous scarlet coils over the riders' heads, and twisting snake-like round the horses' legs, brought the two foremost crashing to the ground, thereby hindering the comrades behind.

Count Bertrand heard the noise without opportunity to look backward for the cause. Verlay pressed him hard. The blows rained swifter and more fierce. He had no breath now for song. Other men went to the rear and helped to pull the fallen horses to their feet. One man lay where he fell, brained with his own axe, which gleamed red in Bûchon's hands. The other leaped up unhurt, and Bûchon had no time to seize another woven arm of defense. Now what might one man on

foot avail against five mounted foes? The result was foregone, and with him down, the gentleman from Provence became a dead conclusion unless help came swiftly. Yet so formidable was the peasant's aspect as he crouched forward, axe in hand, that his assailants paused. Here stood a man who would extort a heavy price for his life.

While they hesitated, looking mutely from one to the other as if each disclaiming the honor of making a first advance, Verlay and Bertrand also ceased their fighting in a pause born of exhaustion.

All were spent for the time, and a deep silence replaced the clamor of battle. It was possible to hear the birds singing in the trees, and the bees humming among the wild jasmine which clothed the monastery wall. Possible, also, to catch another sound, harsh, mysterious, eerie, replete with a suggestion of loneliness, as it wailed at intervals from the cloud of dust that had advanced along the road from the Porte St. Denis.

Clang! A sharp, unlovely bell echoed upon the air. A momentary hush succeeded, then a murmur, indistinguishable at first, but ever growing more distinct as it approached, until at last two words fell as clearly upon the ear as the discordant tongue of the horrible bell itself.

"Unclean! Unclean!"

The cry wailed upon the fragrant May breeze, polluted the fresh green of the trees, stained the crystal purity of the brook, grated upon the music outpouring from the throats of the birds. Disease, bred of man's ignorant foulness upon earth, uplifted its moan to the bare, glittering cleanliness of God's firmament as the lepers emerged from the cloud of dust upon the terrified gaze of Verlay's fighting men. Men and women and little children. Most piteous sight these last where all were

piteous, for, born in the disease, they had never known the fragrance of childhood, and must travel from infancy to such age as the scourge allowed them, buds cankered ere ever they could bloom. The old and the young, the ugly and the fair, men and women with the passions of their kind, the common longings and the hopes of all humanity, doomed to a living death in the Leper House of Saint Lazare.

They were bent thither now, herded like cattle between two lines of the monks of the hospital, upon whom devolved their care. Did one stray from the path, the snap of a whip brought him back into place. Did the multitude tarry in its cry, "Unclean," the whip sang an admonition in the air. Cracking whip, wailing bell, guttural cry, whines for alms, and the monotonous chant of the *"Miserere"* on the monks' lips formed the accompaniment of the horrible procession as it bore down upon the men of Verlay, upon Bûchon, and upon the knight from the south. A yell of disgust and terror broke from nearly every throat. Rodolphe was the first to turn and fly. His men followed pell-mell. Bertrand spurred forward, with Bûchon at his stirrup. They cleared the huts, and turned aside into the fields until that swarm of tainted humanity had passed. Slowly it dragged along. Strange paradox. Marked down by death, it had given life to Bertrand. Its horror lay between Verlay and himself, and the danger was over.

He passed the sword back through the ring at his side.

"A most foul deliverance, friend Bûchon, yet timely. But for it, my own people had been too late."

He pointed to a small troop of horsemen which came swinging round the bend of the monastery wall. At their head rode the woman on the big bay horse. Ber-

trand went forward to meet her. The men-at-arms halted, and these two faced each other alone.

"You are not hurt?" she said rapidly.

"In nothing save my vanity, which grudges victory gained by any means other than my own valor."

He made a comprehensive gesture toward the disappearing lepers. She nodded.

"Had I brought the soldiers five minutes earlier, would you have resented my speed?"

He dismounted, and, thrusting open his visor, knelt in the dust beside her horse and kissed the hem of her robe.

"I would take death from your hands, lady, and die blessed in the gift."

She looked down into the shadow of his helmet and found his eyes.

"Oh!" she said, and then again, "Oh!" rather astonished than disconcerted.

Still kneeling, he held her eyes to his.

"It was bravely done, lady, to bring my men hither. You risked fresh danger from Verlay."

"A small risk, sir, when you were venturing your life for me."

She spoke a little breathlessly, the color flickering in her smooth cheeks. A great coil of raven hair had escaped from its golden band, and fell to her knee. Her gray eyes shone darkly in the sunlight. She was a fair woman indeed to see.

Bertrand rose to his feet. "Now, Venus, give me grace and such another boon. Do you ride to Paris, lady?"

"And beyond. I am waiting for an escort to Toulouse."

"Toulouse?"

His somewhat rugged face softened with pleasure.

"Is it possible that you are the Lady Rosamunde de Tracey, who will marry my lord of Gervaudan?"

"I am indeed Rosamunde de Tracey. And who are you, sir, who know my name, and are so certain of my marriage with this Provençal knight?"

Her small face had hardened. Her voice was sharp, resentful, not lacking an inflection of disdain. Count Bertrand eyed her, as it seemed, in doubt for a moment, then cap in hand, swept her a deep bow.

"I am Count Bertrand of Crein, friend to the lord of Gervaudan, and charged by him to bring his bride in safety to Toulouse."

"Did he lack the leisure himself, sir?"

The words snapped from her red lips, her eyes shone black with anger.

"Lady, he was forced upon a long and arduous journey, and in all his court found no likelier man than me upon whom to lay this honor."

Frowning still, she looked down upon him. His blue eyes met her vexation with such a merry, undaunted smile that in spite of herself, she also smiled, not knowing why.

"You called *'Rose et ma mie.'* Did my lord of Gervaudan give you that right?"

"Why, no, lady, it is a cry of our house," he touched the roses on his yellow surcoat. "Mine the greater honor that it echoes your name."

She stooped to see the roses better and read the motto on his baldrick.

"*Crein ne rien crain,*" she spelled. "Crein fears nothing. A heavy boast, sir."

"I can bear the weight," he answered simply.

"And you fear nothing?"

"Nor Mondays nor Tuesdays," he quoted, laughing.

She fell to tracing the second writing.

"*Je maintiens*—you held me from Verlay."

"Exactly."

She bent a little toward him. Her mouth was small and very red, and her lips were fully and softly curved. Here dwelt a promise which was lacking in her clear, cold eyes.

"For the lord of Gervaudan."

He started, taken aback it seemed, then laughed in a cheery fashion. "For my lord of Gervaudan. You are mine to hold for him."

Lady Rosamunde straightened herself.

"Shall we begin this journey, Count Bertrand? Enid and Margot are waiting at the monastery gate."

"And your retainers, madam?"

"They make the journey by sea to Bordeaux, thence go overland to Toulouse. I like to travel unhindered. The English escort brought me safely here and yesterday left again for England."

He nodded approval, and swung up onto Black King. They rode side by side back to the monastery, Bûchon and the men-at-arms following.

Just outside the heavy gates Enid waited, mounted on a mule, with Margot on the saddle before her. Two of the Trinity brethren stood close by, holding a heavily-laden sumpter mule and a beautiful chestnut horse. The saddle was a broad, velvet-covered, wooden pad, having a back and side piece some twelve inches high, while a narrow velvet-covered board, slung upon cords, served as a footrest. Lady Rosamunde sprang down from the bay horse as the prior of the monastery came out to bid her farewell. She knelt to receive his blessing, then he turned to Bertrand, who had also dismounted, but showed no inclination to kneel.

"Holy Church have you in her keeping, my son."

"God save me from her clutches," quoth Bertrand.

Rosamunde caught her breath, Enid crossed herself aghast, and the soldiers laughed aloud. The prior's fat, jolly face assumed a portentous mien.

"*Retrograde Satanas!* Where do you come from, sir?"

"From the south."

"Ah, the land of heresy. You come from hell, sir."

"A hell of Rome's creation, prior."

He turned with scant ceremony to Rosamunde.

"Now, lady, if you would reach Paris before the gates shut——"

She felt herself swung easily and very gently onto the chestnut horse. Mechanically she gathered up the reins. At a word from Bertrand, Bûchon mounted the bay. One of the soldiers took the sumpter mule from the monk, and without another word the little procession set forth, leaving the scandalized prior and his brethren gasping horrified in the sanctuary of their holy dwelling.

Four or five men went in advance. Behind them rode the knight and the lady, both silent now, his thoughts busy with plans for their safe journey, hers filled with speculation about this man who was to bring her to Toulouse, whose motto ran, "I hold my own," and who blasphemed against Holy Church.

Twenty paces to the rear came Enid, holding Margot, and Bûchon, the wood-cutter. He, too, rode dumb, and Enid, fearful of his harsh, forbidding aspect, had no mind to chatter. Little Margot, worn out by fear and excitement, slept heavily against her breast. Her right arm ached in holding her, and she was trying to shift her to the other, when Bûchon leaned from his saddle

and took the child to himself. Enid opened her mouth to protest.

"Let be," he said gruffly, "she will sleep better here."

Margot stirred, opened her eyes and smiled into his, then slept again, her golden curls mingling with his rough, dark beard. Enid, after another glance at him, made no demur, and thus they came to the Porte St. Denis, passing through which, they found their way to the palace of the king.

CHAPTER IV

IN the year of our Lord 1208 a line drawn from west to east, from the Sèvre Niortaise to Lake Geneva, marked the frontier, here and there irregular and ill-defined, separating northern France, the land of the Langue d'oil, from southern France, the land of the Langue d'oc, which last did not call itself France. The great duchies of Aquitaine and Guyenne, the countships of Auvergne, of Rodez, of Toulouse, of Provence, of Languedoc and Vienne, independent in themselves, were yet united in one vast district under the name of Provence. And from one end to the other of this territory, bounded by the Loire and the Elbe, by the Gulf of Gascony and the Gulf of Genoa, the inhabitants spoke the same language, whose dialects varied but immaterially, sang the same songs, held the same traditions, and were animated by the same spirit of fierce patriotism to resent any attempted interference with their powers and privileges.

Coming from the north and crossing that frontier into this southern land was like stepping suddenly into a country of bewildering fantasy. Left behind, the harsher climate, the colder passions, the sterner morals of France. Vanished, the despotic rule of a fanatic feudalism, obliterated the iron barriers of caste distinction. And, beyond all, dissolved the tyranny of the priesthood in the sweet scented forest air which breathed like a caress through this land of germinating thought.

Further south, the great cities uprose in their opulence along the smiling golden shores. The blue waves of the Mediterranean washing against the castellated walls of Narbonne chanted the song of the East and its glories. The flags of the town streamed upon an air laden with the scented spices of Asia. This same air brought perhaps something greater than the perfume of sandalwood to men's souls. Far away yonder, across the Mediterranean, past the isles of Greece and the wealth of Cyprus, lay Jerusalem and the heart of Christianity. Thousands had fought and failed and died in the vain endeavor to preserve a symbol. What remained? The spirit which had rejected symbols, the spirit which had taught the divinity of man in that one pregnant sentence—"The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

And maybe the wind from the East came burdened with that teaching across the sea, to stir the hearts in the great southern cities to a new realization of man's innate strength and power.

How does the Great Force work? In ways beyond human comprehension. Here a little, there a little. But the leaven was spreading, and in their broader views of life, in their trade with the Saracens, in their richer and gayer lives, in their rejection of dogma, their contempt of symbols, the people of the south were swaying to the breath of Progress.

Evil, and it was alive throughout the land, did not become the fetish which crushed the people of the north, where the worship of God was swamped beneath the fear of Satan. Languedoc sinned deeply enough, yet in its very contempt of sin approached unconsciously nearer to Heaven than Langue d'oil, which sinned more fiercely and more bloodily in the desperation caused by a soul-destroying belief in the powers of Evil.

Whence arose this division of northern and southern Gaul? First of all in the celebrated distinction which divided the Roman idiom into the two languages of *oil* and *oc*—that is to say, in the different manner in which the people of each pronounced the word *oui*. In the north it became *oil*, in the south *oc*.

But the difference lay in far deeper reasons than the accents of language.

Roman civilization had left a wider and more lasting impression upon the south than upon the north. In an age where the nature of the soil, of climate, of environment, became predominating influences, the reason is not far to seek why the sunny lands of the south gave birth to an earlier cultivation of mental and material wealth than the colder provinces north of the Loire.

Languedoc herself was called the Babel of France. Situated in the elbow of the high roads of France, Italy, and Spain, she became a center, so to speak, for these three nationalities, a meeting ground for their assimilation, a mart for the interchange of opinions as well as of commerce. The wonderful civilization of Arabia flowed here from Spain. Jews formed a great part of the population. Narbonne was the headquarters of the Saracens in France. And the knowledge, the science, the chemistry and wonderful Art of these three nations spread and flowered among the people of southern Gaul. For among them their genius found a quick response. Men's spirits turned willingly towards the poetic inspiration of the East, their material instincts grasped the advantages of an extended trade. The great cities of Marseilles, Avignon, Arles, Narbonne, Toulouse, Bordeaux, developed permanent communication with Italy, Greece, Constantinople and the further East. Prosperity smiled over the land, and beneath this continual

movement, this interchange of wealth and ideas, this ever widening of the social and physical horizon, Languedoc sloughed her ignorance and servitude, and burst forth upon an astonished world in a glittering splendor of independence.

Languedoc! The voice of the south, the voice of the sun, of love, of laughter! The language of rippling streams, of scent-laden breezes, the mysterious whisper of the East and its witching glamor. The murmur of the dark-eyed Saracen houri to her western lover. The scent of sandalwood, the perfume of heavy spices, the song of the grape, the epic of the purple fig. The chant of the Orient mingling with the hymn of the Occident. The ring of gold, the rustle of brocaded silk, the clash of arms, the sob of the lute, the shout of battle, the music of song, the splash of blood, the pæan of love. And through all and above all the voice of the inner man piercing the bondage of symbols and superstition, and crying aloud the revolt of reason against authority.

A deep, far-reaching cry this last, and one that shall sound the knell of all other voices in Languedoc save the clash of weapons, the shriek of anguish, and the scream for vengeance against the Church, which in frightened zeal for her maintenance, blotted out the glory of that golden land beneath a veil all red with the blood of massacre.

CHAPTER V

UPON the morning following the rescue of Lady Rosamunde by Bertrand of Crein, Philippe Auguste, King of France, held an audience in his palace upon the Ile de la Cité, the heart and cradle of Paris. The king looked undecided, frowned, and pulled at his golden beard. A great weariness lay in his eyes. A secretary clad in the sober black clothes of clerkship sat writing at a table just behind the royal chair. There were no other officials present.

Pierre of Castelnau, papal legate chosen by Rome to cry in the wilderness of heresy, and Foulquet, Bishop of Toulouse, stood before the king. Both wore the robes of their office, but the bishop carried his more like a layman in disguise than an ecclesiastic. His father was a Genoese merchant, who established himself in Marseilles, and at his death left much wealth to his son. Foulquet deserted commerce for the gayer life of the troubadour. He entered the service of the Viscount of Marseilles, and became famous for more than his songs. For instance, the hopeless adoration of the viscount's fair wife, Azalais of Roquemartine, his treachery towards those lovely ladies, Laure of St. Julien and Mobile of Pontevez, and his disgrace and expulsion from the court. A few years later, broken by jealousy and humiliation, he entered the renowned monastery of Citeaux, emerging thence upon the world in the new

character of a zealous priest. Famous in the past as a troubadour, he was destined to become infamous in the future through his fanatic cruelty.

Two other men completed the gathering in Philippe's room. A Cistercian monk, in the black and white garb of his order, and a soldier, one Count Simon of Montfort, whose name at no very distant time should be branded upon Provence with the mark of hell. A cruel man, but with streaks of mercy in his cruelty and a giant in his genius, his audacity, his courage, his iron will. And with a giant's frame to match the giant mind. His massive head towered above his fellowmen, and none among them could have carried the burden of the armor he wore so lightly.

His military skill had been proved in Palestine. The Pope leaned upon his fanaticism, and it was not mere chance which brought him to Paris simultaneously with Pierre of Castelnau and Foulquet of Toulouse.

They came as emissaries from Pope Innocent III. to persuade the King of France to lend his help in a crusade against Raymond VI., Count of Toulouse.

For in this virtual king of southern France, Rome beheld the enemy who should sap her power. The conquest of Constantinople, and the reunion of the Greek and Roman churches had made Innocent the spiritual chief of the world. Germany was too occupied with international troubles to dispute his aggrandizement. Philippe Auguste was submissive, even to sacrificing the woman he worshipped, and taking back the wife he hated. But the west and south of Europe proved less docile. Vaudois rebelled on the Rhône, Languedoc and the Pyrenees seethed with heresy. Here opened an immense danger for the ecclesiastical authority, and it was to combat this danger that Rome sent her demand for

help to Philippe Auguste, who had proved himself so obedient a son to her commands.

To-day, however, he hesitated before the path traced for his steps. Even his ambition shrank from loosing the hell-hounds of civil war upon France. Moreover, his proud spirit chafed at Rome's dictation. Perhaps memory worked too fiercely in his mind. On this day seven years ago Agnes de Méranie had died of a broken heart if ever woman died from such a cause. Here was no auspicious anniversary for Rome to come seeking favors at his hands.

"You make serious charges against our cousin of Toulouse," he said at length. "It were only fair to hear his defense. Will you repeat those charges before a gentleman from his court who waits without?"

"Even before Raymond himself, sire," came the fierce answer.

Philippe signed to the secretary, who opened the door and called Count Bertrand of Crein. Immediately he presented himself, bowed low to the king, and nodded to Bishop Foulquet with a smile not devoid of malice.

The latter seemed dumbfounded by his appearance, while a look of extreme dislike crossed Father Castelnau's face.

Philippe Auguste addressed himself to the knight.

"Count Bertrand of Crein, the holy bishop here has made charges against Provence and Languedoc which perhaps you may refute."

"Why, sire, if he would complain of the virtue of our ladies——"

The bishop gave a bound.

"Sire," he cried, furious, "this man in himself shall prove the truth of all that I bring against his master."

"Speak," commanded Philippe.

Foulquet glared at Bertrand, who smiled. The two men hated each other well. Then the bishop's voice filled the room. The south had deepened its tones and softened the guttural accents with melody.

"Heresy and schism, sire, throughout the land. The churches are empty, no mass is sung, the children are not baptized. That blessed son of heaven, holy St. Bernard himself, was spat upon by the people. To-day stones are thrown at Dominic, the great light which arose in Spain and shall become as a vast tree amongst whose branches the Church shall lean, and from whose sap she shall gather new strength."

The king turned to Bertrand.

"You hear, sir. What have you to say?"

"I echo my master, the Count of Toulouse, sire. The people thrive amazingly well without the mass."

The bishop cast him an angry glance.

"Sire, this heresy is organized. It has its own bishops, its own council. The doctrines creep upon the land like foul slimy streams which one day shall unite in an ocean of perdition to engulf all Christendom. And the fount of these waters lies in Toulouse, where men barter their immortal souls for Saracen gold and Saracen wantons. Each court has its harems. The Count of Commines flaunts his four wives for all the world to see, and Rome's anathema goes unheeded."

"You hear, sir," said Philippe again to Bertrand. "What defense can you make here?"

"It would seem that my country is on trial in my poor person," answered Bertrand. "What defense, sire? Why, the point of view is more elastic in the south, and a man may find it easier to keep faith with four wives than with one."

"'Tis a code of morality which must hide many a

deadly snare," reproved the king in harsh tones. "I doubt the worthy bishop is right and your country truly accursed."

Then Bertrand's face darkened.

"You say well, sire! Time was when the south went smiling. Now Rome's vengeance smokes over the land. Have you forgotten, sire, the flames that burnt Thierri? Evrand, the friend and valiant knight of the Count of Nevers! And what of Troyes, where these priests burnt eight men for rejecting symbols and trying to follow the simplicity of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose Name be ever honored. Accursed indeed, sire. The word rings true."

"Heretics all," thundered Foulquet, "preaching a most damnable doctrine——"

"The revolt of reason against authority," sneered Bertrand. His breath came quick and short. There were times when his fierce southern blood leapt beyond the control of prudence. Such a time came upon him now. He whipped round upon the king with a reckless laugh.

"Accursed in her priests, yet I hold Provence in her rebellion happier than some other lands where a man is denied, not four wives, but one alone if Rome says 'No.'"

"Mother of God!" said Philippe Auguste, and again, "Mother of God!" A silence ensued. The king's right hand plucked at the dagger in his girdle. Bertrand's eyes never left that hand. The bishop seemed doubtful whether to frown or smile. It was not the first time he had found Bertrand of Crein a hard nut to crack. This reminder of what Rome had taken from him might now arm Philippe to refuse the aid Rome needed. The king's hand dropped upon his knee. A shiver passed over him.

The heart-hunger which swept unchecked into his face was dreadful to see.

"A happier land, indeed," he muttered. "Rome has fettered me——"

He broke off. By an effort of will the sorrow was banished from his eyes. Once again the calculating, ambitious monarch held sway. Yet the hand resting upon the velvet-clad knee still trembled. Bishop Foulquet broke eagerly upon his changed humor.

"Never heed him, sire. Is he not one with Raymond of Toulouse, one with his sins, his follies, his shameless affections?"

Some of Bertrand's anger faded in a broad smile.

"I may not deny acquaintance with sin and folly, but for shameless affections, good bishop, charity I pray. You were no poor lover yourself, Foulquet, before the cruelty of Azalais de Roquemartine changed the troubadour into the monk."

Now how might Foulquet, churchman to-day, answer this stab from the past of Foulquet, lover and troubadour? Fury and the sting of a bitter memory choked him to silence. Brother Alfor glanced at him, then as swiftly lowered his gaze. He was a man of thirty, dark and sallow, with deep eyes and a mouth which had no excuse upon the face of a priest. Pierre Castelnau, however, stepped forward indignant.

"This is the most truculent knight in Raymond's court —knight, forsooth! His nobility is no brighter than the kitchen pans his father scoured."

Bertrand smiled pleasantly. "Even a scullion in Provence deems his son fitted for better things than the priesthood, Pierre of Castelnau."

"You hear, my liege?" The monk threw out his hands in appeal. "Thus do these sons of perdition treat

us. In some towns we dare not show ourselves, the tonsure becomes a reproach, men spit at our names. I myself have been a refugee from their violence."

The king nodded. Count Simon in his corner stared intently at the lithe figure of the Provençal knight, marked the steady eyes and resolute mouth, wondered perhaps if the south held many of his kind.

Pierre threw out his hands as if impatient of some restraint. He was quite bald, and this with his lean, cavernous face gave his head the unpleasant appearance of a skull. Hatred and fanaticism burned in his eyes as he turned upon Bertrand.

"For many years have I gone up and down the accursed country preaching the faith," he cried. "The seed has fallen upon barren soil. Men will not leave their errors. The whole of the south is breaking away from Rome, and this man's master and such as he are the agents of Satan to accomplish the destruction. Bethink you, sire, this scullion-knight stood at Count Raymond's elbow while I exhorted him in his court of Toulouse. He whispered in Raymond's ear——"

The furious voice died away before a wide smile on Bertrand's face. A faint curiosity flickered into the king's cold eyes.

"Well, Count Bertrand, the whisper, the whisper!"

"Sire, the preacher had fulminated at some length, yet his discourse was not more empty than his crown, and less polished. At the conclusion he shook his head portentously, and, throwing back the monk's cowl from his eyes, demanded, *'Raymond, quand te corrigeras-tu?'* It was then I whispered to the count, who forthwith answered, *'Quand tu te peigneras.'* "[1]

[1] "Raymond, when will you correct your errors?"
"When you comb your hair."

Philippe Auguste passed his hand across his mouth.

"An unseemly jest to a sainted preacher of Holy Church," he said in a voice that shook a little. "In truth, a spirit of blasphemy would appear loose in your country, sir knight."

"Sire, in our country we call that spirit freedom."

Bishop Foulquet motioned the Cistercian to silence. His own countenance was forbidding in its harshness.

"Your majesty, I pray you not to heed his insolence. Heresy lies incarnate in him. He is one with these accursed Manicheans, who assert that God manifests Himself in man. He believes——"

But Bertrand stayed him.

"Gently, Foulquet. Good bishop, gently I pray. Let me recite my own credo."

He took a step forward. His left hand fell lightly upon his sword hilt and his head was flung back.

"I believe in man's right to live his life as he will, so he be not afraid to face the consequences. And I believe," he paused and drew a long breath of deepest enjoyment, "I believe in a man's right to fight for what he wants, and to hold that which is already his."

The priests shuddered, but Count Simon nodded, and the king leaned toward the Provençal.

"Now, for what things will a man fight his best, Count Bertrand?"

"Liberty, sire, and love."

"License," thundered Foulquet.

"Not so, bishop, but liberty to worship the God which frees thought and lifts us into something higher than wooden puppets dancing to monk-pulled strings."

"Oh, heresy, oh, direst blasphemy!" wailed Pierre of Castelnau.

"What of love?" asked Philippe Auguste.

Bertrand of Crein looked straight into the eyes of this king who had loved so deeply, who had brought Rome's curse upon his country for love's sake, but who had yielded at the last, and whose love lay in her grave with the heart he had broken.

"In Provence, sire, a man only yields the lady he worships, and whose regard crowns his life, to death, not to a priest's dictation."

The king started, lashed by intolerable memory.

"Again?" he cried in fury. "You go too far, sir. I have killed a man for less."

"And a woman for less still, but in the south we rank a woman's love above a Romish curse," returned Bertrand hotly.

The king leaped from his chair with outstretched hands as though to strangle this man who taunted him. The secretary cried aloud. The priests looked on bewildered. Count Simon half drew his sword, but Bertrand faced the king undaunted, his own eyes fierce with an anger that recked little of kingship.

"I am not the only soldier of Provence who would have drawn his sword for Madame Agnes de Méranie," he said.

At the sound of that name Philippe Auguste dropped his hands to his sides.

"Agnes—Agnes!" he repeated, and the whisper came like a woman's name kissed upon her lips by the man who worshipped her. Its spell wafted him back to golden memories. Those watching saw his face soften wondrously as for a brief space he passed once again through the golden portals of love. Abruptly he turned, and, going to the window, stood awhile with his back toward the others, dreaming of a woman's face and of the light in a woman's eyes.

But the features of Bishop Foulquet worked with rage. In reminding the king of what Rome had taken from him, Bertrand had probably undone the effects of his own persuasive eloquence.

"The curse of Holy Church ban you for a blaspheming heretic," he snarled, yet softly, not to disturb the king. "But have a care, sir. Your time and the time of those like you is short. Where prayer and exhortation fail, the Holy Father gives leave to us his servants to use weapons which will bring understanding to the soul through the feeling of the body. Perchance the dagger and the sword will free the devils possessing you."

"'Tis an argument I should understand more clearly, and freely welcome, holy troubadour."

The bishop stamped his foot with rage.

"Will you mock me, Bertrand of Crein? Fool, laugh on, but I tell you the day of reckoning is nigh. Languedoc is the Judea of France. Like Judea, she, also, has her Sodom and Gomorrha. Now let her repent while Mother Church still holds her hand, lest the vengeance of the priests give even to her also the bitterness of a Dead Sea."

Then Count Simon of Montfort spoke for the first time.

"There are soldiers to fight for Holy Church, and men to lead them, Count Bertrand."

Bertrand looked at the iron frame and the austere face of this man whose military genius and religious fanaticism were famous throughout Christendom.

"Will you lead the armies against us, sir? In very truth you compliment Provence. Come, sir, when your sword needs sharpening. I can promise you a willing whetstone." And the eager light flamed again into his eyes, casting a glow over his whole face.

The king turned from the window. As of old, his face was cold and hard.

"Enough, Count Bertrand," he said peremptorily. "You have heard the bishop's indictment of your master, the Count of Toulouse, and of the provinces he rules. Take him this message from me, the King of France. Normandy is mine by conquest. If the interests of Holy Church need safeguarding, what shall hinder me from saving Provence out of the devil's hands, and adding her also to the Crown?"

A bewildered expression came into Bertrand's eyes.

"Conquest? Provence added to France?" he stammered. Then as understanding flashed upon him the hot blood of his race seethed within his breast, and the veins on his forehead swelled like cords. All prudence was forgotten in fury at that insult to his patriotism.

"What shall hinder you?" he shouted. "Why, this, and a hundred thousand like it."

He whirled forth his sword, and with a great sweeping movement set the air singing about the room. Then as quickly returned it to his side, and bowed low to the king.

"I will bear your message to the count, your cousin and my master, sire. Now, have you any further commands to lay upon me before I set out with the Lady Rosamunde on our journey to Toulouse?"

It had happened so rapidly, his audacity was so stupendous that Philippe almost lost sight of anger in amazement.

"The punishment is death to him who draws sword in the presence of his king," he said slowly.

"Sire, Provence has no king, and I but answered your question to my best endeavor. For the rest, I am the

accredited ambassador from the Count of Toulouse—and you threatened my country through me."

Philippe shrugged his shoulder. "Peace, sir. Your bravado wearies us. One thing alone saved your life." He meant that passionate tribute to Agnes de Méranie, and Bertrand guessed it. "In return for our forbearance, you shall do us this favor. Bishop Foulquet, with the Holy Legate, and Brother——"

"Alfor, sire," said Foulquet, and the dark, silent monk bowed humbly.

"Desire an escort to Cîteaux. You will see them thus far in safety?"

Bertrand cast a whimsical look at the king.

"Heaven preserve your Majesty's sense of humor. Will you entrust three priests to their sworn foe?"

"No, sir, but to a brave gentleman who has a debt to pay."

"Heaven reward your Majesty's appreciation. To Cîteaux be it."

"Brother Alfor is for Béziers," said the bishop.

"Where in every house there is the idiot's room," said Bertrand affably.

A furious glance shot into the Cistercian's eye. Bishop Foulquet and Pierre of Castelnau frowned, but Simon of Montfort laughed grimly. Unmoved by frowns or laughter, Count Bertrand made his bow to the king.

"Heaven save your Majesty. Adieu, sir count. I pray you knock at my door when you come preaching salvation to Provence. Good bishop, do not tarry. The passing of an hour will see us start."

The door closed behind him and they heard his steps ringing firmly down the stone passage. Count Simon of Montfort looked from the king to the bishop.

"A goodly man, sire."

"A blaspheming heretic!" cried Pierre of Castelnau.

"I did not say a 'godly' man, father," retorted the great soldier dryly.

"What answer shall I take to the Holy Father, sire?" demanded Foulquet, with undisguised eagerness.

Philippe Auguste rose. His eyes were hungry with an unappeasable longing.

"Tell him the time is not yet ripe."

"But, sire, all Christendom cries to you."

"I do not hear it. Only one cry reaches my ear, the cry of a woman's broken heart. Take that message to the Church who slew her."

They drew back, bowing low as he passed to the door, and went away to fight the black hour which found out the King of France even as it found the humblest of his subjects. But when he had gone, Bishop Foulquet raised himself, and, throwing up his right hand in a fury of fanatical disappointment, called down heaven's curse upon Bertrand of Crein, who had outwitted him.

CHAPTER VI

IT was already two hours past noon when the cavalcade wended through the Porte St. Jacques, and took the southern road. Ten men-at-arms in front, ten behind, all garbed in the black and yellow of Crein, with three roses broidered on their surcoats. In the rear company came Bûchon, attired also in the livery of his new master. Already he carried himself more erect, but rode in gloomy silence, upon which his companions had no mind to break. Only little Margot chattered to him as merrily as a pie, and seemed well satisfied with the few words he grunted from time to time. She was clad like a boy, in blue doublet and hose, and rode her pony bravely astride.

Foremost of all went Bertrand, with his young page, Gaston of Nîmes, beside him, carrying his shield. The knight's visor was up, revealing a cheerful countenance. Yet if his mouth smiled, his eyes never lost their hawk-keenness. Paris with her crimes, her filth, her disease and unbearable odors, lay behind them, but the sweet, open country held foes enough for the traveler, and he was conveying a treasure without price. Therefore, he did not relax vigilance, but rode with the prudence of the well-seasoned soldier.

In the middle of the escort came Bishop Foulquet on a noble bay horse, a gift from Philippe Auguste. He, too, wore armor and a sword. The Church needed militarism then and her sons showed themselves gallant

fighters. Yet Pierre of Castelnau had refused both sword and armor. He clothed himself in the shield of his sacred calling, and rode forth in his monk's gown of black and white cloth with no other protection than such as might be found in his escort. And probably his trust was justified. Twenty stout men-at-arms—even though sons of Diabolus—would be no mean wall between a priest and danger.

Close upon the heels of his small Norman horse came Brother Alfor bestriding a mule. He rode with his head sunk upon his breast and the monk's cowl pulled forward over his face. Neither to right nor to left did he cast a glance, which, perhaps, was his loss, yet, perhaps, a help to his soul's salvation. For at the one hand rode Enid, the tirewoman, herself as fresh and sweet as the sunny morning, and at the other rode Lady Rosamunde, whose beauty shone bravely in the sunshine.

The bishop, who had ridden out of Paris in resentful silence, threw aside his brooding at last and spoke to her.

"A long journey lies before you, my daughter."

"Long, indeed, my father. Do you ride all the way with us?"

"Not I, but Brother Alfor here journeys to Béziers. A godly man and you may find profit in his discourse."

She barely glanced at the monk. "And you?"

"I am for Cîteaux."

"The great monastery! I have heard it spoken of in England."

"What do they say in England?"

"Why, my father, they say many things." Her eyes shone more brightly, and her lips relaxed. The bishop frowned.

"Beware of irreverence, my daughter. The English are an accursed race and fear neither man nor devil."

"Nor Church," she said softly. "The late king——"

"A devil incarnate. He was in league with Arragon and Provence against Rome."

"Yet he had a kindly heart, father. I was his ward, and grew up in the shelter of the court."

"A hotbed of profligacy."

"Maybe, but it did not reach the convent where he placed me. And when I was seventeen King Richard married me to the noblest gentleman in England—the Lord Henry of Tracey."

Foulquet smiled grimly. "Kind indeed to bring the richest dowry in Aquitaine to fill empty English coffers. And so you were happy, my daughter."

"Quite happy, father. My husband treated me well. I grieved sorely when he died."

A shadow skimmed her face as light and transitory as the shade cast by the wing of a bird when it flies above a tranquil pool. Henry of Tracey was fifty when he married this child fresh from her convent, and she had given him the affection of a daughter to a parent rather than that of wife to lord. Gentle and courteous he ever proved himself, saw that she lacked nothing due to her estate, but for the rest the marriage had been political, and the last two years of his wedded life were spent fighting in France, where six months previously he met his death. And now Rosamunde should marry again. Would this second husband trouble the serenity of her clear, deep eyes? Foulquet looked at her meditatively. His experience told him what she did not know. Sorrow had brushed her but very lightly, and only upon the outer petals of life, which as yet still enfolded the heart of her womanhood. When one by one they unfolded at the command of her development, and the palpitating soul lay exposed to what

Fate and her own desires had brought her, then sorrow would return to mark her deeply, so surely as the river runs to the sea. Because such deep eyes in a woman's face call to grief to complete their haunting glamor, and such a mouth with its full, red curves needs the droop of pain to soften and warm the mystery of its promise.

So mused Foulquet, Bishop of Toulouse, who had been troubadour once, and across whose life many fair women had passed. Eyes and mouth for sorrow, and only the broad white brow and the firm chin to hint at the courage to bear it.

But grief and Lady Rosamunde Tracey seemed far apart on this gay spring morning. Young and healthy, beautiful beyond most women, she rode serenely toward the south, where one of the most powerful lords in Provence—under Count Raymond—waited to make her his wife. Pride of race, pride of wealth, pride of position, she had a right to all three. King Richard had called her cousin. The noblest Saxon blood had mingled with the Norman blood in her dead husband, and his wealth united to the lands she held in Aquitaine made her one of the richest heiresses in the two countries.

"And you will marry Count Hubert of Gervaudan," said Foulquet presently. "I wish for your soul's sake you had not chosen a husband south of the Loire, where heresy is rife."

"I had no choice. King John arranged the matter. I am a royal ward."

She spoke quite indifferently, content to acquiesce in the fashion of her day, which regarded the woman merely as an appendage to the wealth she brought her husband. Then with feminine curiosity she added:

"Do you know Count Hubert? Is he a likely man?"

"Well-favored enough for a man of sixty," allowed his reverence grudgingly.

"Sixty!" A shade flitted into her eyes. It is possible that she had been dreaming of a young lover and of a romance which had not yet touched her twenty years.

"Ay," pursued Foulquet, "and has lived his life seeking company with the devil and flouting heaven. Entreat the saints, daughter, that you may draw him back into the fold."

"Is he a heretic!" she asked, and crossed herself.

"He and all his followers. And his boon companion, and aider and abetter in all his sins, rides yonder at the head of the troop."

"Count Bertrand!"

She recalled then his scandalous behavior at the Trinity and her own doubt.

"He does not love the Church—I remember——" She broke off, unwilling for some undefined reason to repeat his words to this bishop, whose face had grown dark and vengeful.

"As little as the Church loves him. And the day is coming which shall prove who is the better hater."

He looked so inhuman in the grip of that fanatical longing for vengeance against the enemies of Holy Church that involuntarily she drew the chestnut a little further aside. Then her eyes roved over the sturdy escort under whose protection the Church fared, and a disdainful smile curved her mouth.

"Yet you confide your safety to your enemy, holy father. Is that wise?"

"The King of France has pledged him."

"Oh! And what surety has he given to the king?"

"His knightly word."

"Oh! And will you trust to that—in an enemy?"

Now Bishop Foulquet hated Count Bertrand with a relentless fervor, but the force of character which made him so powerful to hate lifted him above the petty spite of disparaging a man's proven honor.

"Count Bertrand keeps a promise—even to a foe," he allowed coldly.

The smile deepened on her lips.

"You are well protected, father, but I for one would not ride beholden to the man I hated."

She burst into laughter, and, hearing that bright music, Pierre of Castelnau looked up from his meditation, while Brother Alfor awoke as from a dream, and fixed his dark gaze upon this gracious lady. Mirth softened her eyes, her red lips curved deliciously over small white teeth. Brother Alfor gasped and leaned forward upon his mule. More than ever did that mouth disgrace his monk's robe. Then Lady Rosamunde, laughing yet, turned her head aside, and at the same moment a heavy hand upon his shoulder wrenched him round to meet the blaze of Bertrand's face.

"You sacrilegious dog! Get forward!"

His sword pricked the mule's flank. The animal sprang up with a vigor that nearly unseated the monk and caused momentary confusion among the front ranks, into which he plunged. The soldiers cursed mule and rider freely, and Bertrand called to Bûchon.

"The Church should lead in the van," quoth he grimly. "See that it does not lag on the way, friend Bûchon."

The latter nodded, and took his place behind the mule. Margot pressed her pony on to keep his company. Enid went forward with the child, and Lady Rosamunde looked bewildered, not a little shocked and doubtful.

The bishop and Pierre of Castelnau were furious, but,

roughly enough, Count Bertrand bade them hold their peace.

"I have the ordering of this company, and each man will ride where I tell him. No offense, holy fathers, but I feel more at ease with my eyes on a priest's back than with his eyes on mine."

He motioned them forward, and, subdued for once by his dominant imperiousness, they obeyed sullenly. Bertrand fell into line beside Lady Rosamunde.

CHAPTER VII

THE anger still darkened his face. She looked at him with curiosity.

"How did the poor monk offend, Count Bertrand?"

"The cause lies between him and me. I will not soil your ears with it."

"Indeed! I noticed nothing wrong."

"Does the rose see the slug on the ground beneath her?"

"Slug!" She frowned. This open hostility to the Church she had been taught to reverence and fear roused her to its defense.

"I travel under your protection, sir, and I appeal to your chivalry for a boon."

A haughty suppliant this, with her dainty head carried so proudly. Bertrand bent low in his saddle.

"Mine the boon that you should stoop to ask it."

"Then, sir, while I am in your company, you will oblige me by treating the holy fathers with due reverence. Insulting them, you insult me, who hold the doctrines of Holy Church in firm faith, and have all heresy in abhorrence."

"Lady, I would die a thousand deaths to save the least hair on your head from danger and insult. You shall prove me yet, I pray. But the matter of these priests you shall leave to my good judgment."

"You refuse me, sir?"

"Never! I beg you to wait upon understanding."

Her eyes began to sparkle dangerously.

"A quibble, sir. Neither was I ever counted a dullard. Where is the vaunted chivalry of Provence?"

"Here, in my arm and in my heart, to guard you against dangers seen and unseen."

His voice held a peculiar tone, soft, yet deep, and with a musical lilt of the last accents which was undoubtedly attractive. Lady Rosamunde felt her anger slipping away, therefore clung to it more desperately.

"I would talk with Brother Alfor," she said imperiously. "The bishop says he is a godly man whose conversation will profit the soul."

"And maybe lose the body."

"Sir!" she flamed.

"Madam, I know of what I speak. Will you have it plainer?"

"How dare you! How dare you! To me, Rosamunde of Tracey!"

"To you and to any woman who is in my care!"

"Such care becomes an insult," she panted. "My virtue has not been learned in Provence, Count Bertrand."

"Nor perhaps your prudence, Lady Rosamunde," returned he, unmoved. "I never doubted your virtue, but how does a lamb's innocence avail when the wolf's jaws close round it?"

"Infamous!" she breathed. "What does a Provençal knight know of a priest's sanctity or a lady's chastity? The first you blaspheme, the second you hold a blunder. Yes, sir, England knows somewhat of your manners. We have heard of Ermengarde of Narbonne and her Courts of Love. Indeed, for very safety's sake, I think it wiser to ride under the protection of Holy Church than under yours."

Thus she poured her wrath upon him, and with a touch of the heel sent the chestnut forward to join the bishop and Pierre of Castelnau. But Black King moved as swiftly, and a strong hand upon the rein checked her.

"I command here," said Bertrand, and his eyes shone very bright and hard. "You will not ride in front."

"I ride where I will. Remove your hand, sir. You forget yourself." Her eyes were blazing. Temper played over her as lightning plays over a summer sky. "Am I not Lady Rosamunde of Tracey, cousin to King Richard, countess in my own right, and affianced to your master, who claims kinship with Philippe of France," she went on rapidly, stammering here and there in her anger. "I give orders, sir; I have yet to learn to take them from those in humbler rank."

"No time like the present," said Bertrand. "Rein in a little, madam. You hamper our good bishop."

And deliberately he pulled the chestnut back.

"Sir!" she panted, and again "Sir!"—crimson now beneath his mocking, angry eyes.

"Now, madam, you have twice assailed the virtue of our southern ladies, and, moreover, have aspersed my honor in your wrath. Your vanity has even deemed me weak enough to betray my trust. Well, other men have damned themselves for a woman's kiss, and I am no better than my fellows. But if I should desire to play Lancelot, lady, heaven send you strength greater than Guinevere's to put temptation from you."

His taunts cut deep into her pride, and set it quivering, so that she flushed and paled in turn, and trembled upon her saddle. Her lips parted, but she found no words to answer him. And he, smarting yet, laughed cruelly, then bowed his head and left her, as of a sudden the cavalcade halted in momentary disarray. For as those

in front checked, those behind crowded in upon them, and in the confusion Lady Rosamunde was swept forward to where Bertrand sat, surveying a quaint scene. Here the bishop and Pierre of Castelnau joined them, while close by Brother Alfor checked his mule under the tireless watch of Bûchon, the wood-cutter.

The track ran over grass land, dotted with clumps of trees, the beginning of a wood which marked the boundary of the domain of Vauvert. The ancient castle bore an evil name. People swore it was haunted, that every night witnessed an assembly of devils who practiced the infamous *Sabbat*, a festival dedicated to Satan. No one passed it willingly even in daylight lest evil spirits were met on the way. At night it became a center of gloomy desolation, abandoned to the horrors, real or imaginary, with which it was invested. One terror at least here took practical form. A hideous gibbet stood by the roadside. Something which had once been human rotted in the chains, poisoning the spring air. At its foot stood a small group of people palpably gripped by strong excitement. Men and women talked loudly, held each other by the arm, explaining, gesticulating, ever and again pointing at a man who hung limply in the support of two monks. A richly attired abbot stood beside him, an expression of great satisfaction upon his shrewd face, while herded close upon the little group came the fifty or more splendidly mounted and extravagantly dressed retainers, without whom no self-respecting prelate ever dreamed of riding abroad.

"Jesu Maria! Saints preserve us! A miracle! A sign from heaven! The Queen of Heaven herself! I repeat—I heard him tell the holy father—the world has not seen the like."

The confused chattering rose deep and shrill in vary-

ing tones. Then the abbot made a sign and the hubbub ceased. He looked at Count Bertrand, whose face betrayed his impatience at this check.

"Heaven claims your indulgence, sir knight. A miracle has been wrought even here in the shadow of Vauvert."

"Heaven is doubtless kind, sir abbot, yet I shall be obliged if you will extend that favor and suffer us to pass. I must reach a safe haven before sundown."

But Foulquet pressed forward, and, declaring his name and rank, demanded the tale of this miracle.

The abbot bowed reverently, and, ignoring Bertrand's impatience, told his story.

"This fellow," pointing to the inert figure, "was a highway robber, caught yesterday in his villainy and hanged on this gallows. A sinner doubtless, yet mark well the mercy of heaven. Whenever setting forth on his nefarious expeditions this thief never failed to address a prayer to the Virgin. While the cord was round his neck he made his usual supplication. Brethren, the Holy Virgin remembered such faithful service," here he paused dramatically, and the crowd gasped. Then he flung his arms up skyward, "The Holy Mother descended from heaven and with her white hands supported his feet, so that he still lived this morning when the executioner came to remove the body."

He dropped his arms. The people murmured, crossed themselves, and fell on their knees. Lady Rosamunde was plainly moved to awe. Even the soldiers seemed impressed, but Count Bertrand's hand covered his mouth.

"A miracle, indeed," said Foulquet, "one to be duly honored by the Church in devoutest gratitude."

"A shrine shall be erected on this spot where the miracle took place," said the abbot. "Pilgrims will flock

hither with gifts to heaven, while the penitent has prayed admittance to our own monastery close by."

The miracle was a good day's work for the abbot. The renown of it would bring thousands to his gates to see the man saved by divine interposition. Bertrand stared appreciatively into the shrewd face.

"Who hanged the villain, sir abbot?" he asked suddenly, and the latter looked taken aback.

"Why, sir, he hanged at my instance."

"And what executioner found him living, when by my soul the world would not have grudged heaven such a villainous countenance?"

"The executioner is my servant. What then, sir? Will you deny heaven's marvel?" asked the abbot solemnly.

"Not I, good abbot. Is it not ever with us—in men's stupidity?"

"Sir!"

"Heed him not," interrupted Foulquet. "'Tis a heretic from Toulouse."

"Ah," said the abbot with an evil look. "Toulouse may also need heaven's support and find no miracle to save her in the day of anguish."

"Do I not carry salvation with me?" laughed Bertrand, pointing at Foulquet and Pierre of Castelnau.

"Salvation, indeed, if the sinners would accept it," retorted Pierre. Then he addressed the abbot. "You and I have met before, good abbot. How fares the work?"

"Well, very well. The seed falls on rich ground here. Will you lie to-night at the Château of Ponthieu?"

"By your leave, yes," struck in Bertrand. "Forward there!"

"The baron will take the cross," shouted the abbot, springing nimbly aside as the troop reformed and Castel-

nau and Foulquet were carried away in the move. The little crowd of men and women scattered before its advance, while the abbot's retinue drew back helter-skelter, anathematizing the rough soldiers who jostled them with no respect for their monkish robes.

Brother Alfor on his mule, Bûchon ever on guard, Margot with curls streaming in the wind, Enid watchful of her child, all swept onward, leaving the gallows, the thief and the miracle to the obscurity of distance, and to the monks, who so cleverly directed the superstitions of that dark and ignorant age.

Lady Rosamunde found no opportunity to resume her former place. The horses behind fretted the chestnut who refused to be drawn back. A bound carried her beside Black King. To check then would once again halt them all. Common sense subdued pride, and so she rode at the head of the troop, side by side with Bertrand. Neither glanced to right or left, neither spoke a word, but now and again a glint of the setting sun upon his armor dazzled her eyes, while he was ever conscious of the flutter of her skirts against his stirrup.

The wind freshened as evening drew nigh. The warmth of treacherous May perished beneath its chill rush. The trees spread their branches like some lattice work of intricate design upon a cold sky of palest lemon. Behind this network of arms, the gaunt gray ruin of the haunted castle rose boldly against the flaming crimson of the sunset. A sinister looking place, indeed, even in brightest sunshine, now in the shadows of falling dusk a place of such vivid horror, born of its ghastly reputation, that priests, women, and soldiers alike hurried by with suffocating dread thumping at their hearts.

For them every shadow held a devil ready to carry body and soul to damnation, every sob of the wind

among the trees was the cry of a lost spirit in anguish. Swiftly then, lest the Foul Fiend himself appear and sweep men, women, and child captives to his fearful revels in the ruins of Vauvert.

Not one but breathed more freely when a bend in the road hid the castle from sight, and even then terror had not done with them. For now they must pass right beneath the walls of the Fief des Tombes, that ancient burial place of dead Romans and French men and women, who nightly left their graves to join in Satan's gathering at the château. Here indeed they fell into something like a panic, pressing indecorously upon their leader's heels, until the grim death-yard was left behind, and superstitious fear yielded to one more practical. For the sun was sinking quickly now, and with its disappearance went the protection of the owner through whose land they journeyed. From sunrise to sundown the holders of the great fiefs and their subordinates were bound by law to protect all travelers in their domains. Darkness, however, removed this obligation, and left unfortunate voyagers to the mercy of the cutthroats who infested the country, they being often the hirelings of the overlord himself.

Therefore, Count Bertrand urged his people forward, and, thanks as much to his caution as to the numbers of his troop, they reached the gateway of the Baron of Ponthieu's castle just as Phœbus disappeared in a sea of molten gold and the veil of night descended softly upon the land.

CHAPTER VIII

IN those centuries which saw Europe heaving in the birth-throes of her civilization, a common need opened the hospitality of monastery and castle alike to the passing traveler. Once outside the precincts of the towns, and journeying through the vast wooded and unpopulated, uncultivated areas of land, people looked naturally to the nearest monastic or seigneurial dwelling for a night's food and shelter. Both were always given freely, for the host of to-night might be the pilgrim of to-morrow, and did Jack refuse John, John would certainly shut the door in Jack's face. Moreover, the laws of chivalry ordained such hospitality to all who claimed it, not excepting a deadly foe, and therefore Bertrand sounded the horn at the gateway of Ponthieu with serene confidence in a night's shelter, if not in a very hearty welcome.

For northern France hated the south, affected to despise her for that lilt eastward, yet nourished a very firm jealousy of her wealth, and with it a growing desire to lay greedy hands upon the prosperity of the smiling land. The proud feudal lords of the north had no sympathy with the democratic nobility of Provence, and Bertrand had not found over much cordiality upon his journey to Paris. This troubled him not at all. A sunny temperament made little of cold looks, while a ready sword had effectually prevented open hostility.

Now side by side with Lady Rosamunde he led the

small troop across the drawbridge, beneath the heavy portcullis, and so into the courtyard, which the sound of the horn had filled with people.

Men ran hither and thither with torches to light the way; pages hurried forward to hold the stirrups, but Bertrand had dismounted and lifted Lady Rosamunde from the saddle before another hand could touch her. Then with her fingers lightly held in his, he led her to the arched doorway wherein stood the baron and his lady, and here, bowing low, cap in hand, he made known her rank and state, and craved the boon of a night's shelter from their hands. Which being graciously accorded, he forthwith presented the bishop and Pierre of Castelnau. Baron and lady immediately knelt to receive a blessing, then rising, showed the way into the hall with many professions of hospitality toward the Church and Lady Rosamunde, and a more restrained courtesy toward Count Bertrand.

If he perceived the difference he made no sign, being much absorbed in contemplation of his surroundings.

The Château of Ponthieu presented, indeed, the latest style of baronial dwelling. The north might exclaim against the luxury of the south, but already the newer ideas of comfort which were filtering into Europe by way of the Crusades had tinged people with desires for more commodious homes. The keep, which of old had been the chief place of residence, was in this case relinquished except in time of siege. Two noble rooms, twenty-eight feet by sixteen, lay on each side of the main gateway. One served as kitchen, the other as a general sleeping apartment for the serving-men. Female servants were not dreamed of. Even my lady did not always have a tirewoman, but was tended by her young pages. Two other rooms of equal size lay above these on the

ground floor, but were separated by an ante-room, or large landing, built immediately over the entrance arch. Of these rooms, one was set apart for a general living room during the day, and here lord and lady took their meals with the high and low of their retinue. At night it became the sleeping chamber of the junior pages, esquires and young knights, all learning the gentle art of knighthood under my lord's banner. The other room harbored those knights of higher rank, men who owned small fiefs, and who in return for the baron's protection and a monetary consideration, furnished him with fighting men and horses to carry on the endless campaigns of that internecine warfare which was devastating France. And here in this room, also, slept my lord and his lady, their privacy secured by screens, a wholesome fear of the baron, and (theoretically) the laws of chivalry which held women divine, and raised men above the baseness of human temptations.

So far was this ideal carried that when the lord of the castle rode out to war, for a week, a month, a year, one special knight among his friends was selected not only to hold the castle against all onslaughts, but also to companion my lady in her loneliness, and to guard her from every harm. The pious simplicity of the Middle Ages saw nothing inordinate in leaving a woman shut up alone in a castle with twenty or thirty men. And if this same pious simplicity of faith occasionally received rude shocks, it knew how to punish with ferocious singleness of purpose, or—alas for piety!—learned a mutual forbearance which made wedlock in baronial hall and bower a theme for the greatest tragedies, most pungent satires, and exquisite love poems sung by the minstrels of the day.

To return to the description of this Château of Pon-

thieu. The small ante-room served as a guard-room to the other two. A few soldiers and the baron's favorite dogs were always found there. From one side, through a low arch set in the thick tower wall, rose a staircase leading to a vast apartment on the second floor, and which occupied the entire space of the building. This was used on state occasions, or for any extraordinary occurrence, and here the baron and his lady led their guests.

It seemed evident that a feast was in preparation, for a garnished dining board ran down the center of the hall, and the carved chairs of the baron and baroness were already in position. New sweet-smelling rushes, a foot or more deep, strewed the wooden floor, and tallow candles, three feet tall and as thick as a child's arm, burned in iron sconces fixed upon the walls.

The travelers made such primitive preparation for dinner as primitive customs ordained. The bishop doffed his steel cap and shirt of mail, standing forth a very fine muscular man in his velvet tunic embroidered with the holy symbol. Count Bertrand also gave his steel coif, his mittens and leg pieces to the page Gaston. His sword, too, was laid aside, but he retained the dagger hanging from the mammel or ring on his chest.

And now for the first time Lady Rosamunde had a clear view of the man in whose care she bided. The bright light shone full upon him, threw into bold relief against the bare wooden walls his tall, spare frame, the great sweep of his shoulders, the length of his limbs. His brown hair fell in thick waves to his shoulders. He wore a moustache, but no beard, and his lips showed full and large, parting over strong, white teeth when he spoke or smiled, in a quick, hungry way, which seemed to reveal the quick, hungry desires of an ardent soul.

Passion lurked about that mouth, but his chin was firm and square, and his blue eyes frank and steady. A man born and bred in the many vices and few virtues of the Middle Ages, a man born with the lust of fighting rampant in his veins, who revelled in the shout of war and the smell of blood, a man who loathed a priest, and held his neighbor's wife a legitimate mistress could he win her esteem, a man who would as a matter of course hang his serf from his battlements for mere pilfering, but yet a man who would also risk his own life to save his own people from a common foe. He hated a lie, and never tricked an enemy by dirty ways; moreover, he was a man who for all his thirty years had not yet sounded his own nature, and as yet remained ignorant of his own possibilities for good and evil.

Thus Lady Rosamunde saw him. A very proper man he seemed to her. And as their eyes met she forgot their quarrel, and remembered only his motto—"What I have, I hold," and a queer little gasp came through her lips, and then she turned away, and in the turning knew that his eyes still followed her. And she, vaguely confused herself, met the gaze of Alfor the monk, who had entered with them, and now stood giving apparent ear to what passed between Castelnau and the baron. Something in that look startled her. For a moment she imagined she had seen into a vortex of seething desire and whirling rebellion, but then he lowered his eyes, and she chid herself for an unholy fancy.

A page took her cloak, and brought a ewer of water for her hands, with a cloth to wipe them. The baroness, who after the first greetings had remained very silent, looked with fresh interest at this guest, whose fairness now shone undisguised. Rosamunde met her glance. They exchanged the mutual and mute inquiry with

which women in all ages and in all places take each other's measure. The years of these two might have been equal, neither could dispute the beauty of the other, but the unconscious questioning of life looking out from the widow's clear eyes, found no reflection in those of the wife. Hers held an answer branded in their somber depths for those who had the gift to read it.

She was clad with much splendor in silken robes of shimmering emerald hue. Pearls were bound about her red hair, and twined in the two heavy plaits which fell to her knees. Pearls also lay upon her bare throat. Milk white jewels upon a milk white breast, but neither so pale as the face rising upon the stem of that lily throat. Black eyes gleamed oddly in its whiteness, red lips broke upon it like a blood-stain. A slim figure, statuesque in its frozen stillness, yet suggesting curiously enough the tension of a string about to snap, and small white fingers playing vaguely with the rich girdle binding her slender waist. Such was the lady of Ponthieu as she stood in her husband's house welcoming her guests to the banquet now preparing.

The baron, a short, thick-set man of forty, vied with his wife in gorgeousness of attire. His harsh, tanned face, reflecting in every line the brutality of the age in which he lived, looked curiously ill-suited by its frame of golden hair, which was long enough to touch his shoulders, and had a ribbon bound fillet-wise through its artificial waves. Beard and mustache were also curled and scented, and he wore a tunic and mantle of violet velvet. Gold colored stockings fastened by purple leg bands, and sandals of purple cloth fretted with gold completed his costume. One of the strangest anomalies of the day was found in the dandyism of the nobles, who in their ignorance and cruelty and lack of all re-

finement were no better than utter barbarians, murderers, and robbers.

"You come at a good moment," said the baron, approaching Bertrand. "This morning only I returned after a month's absence. The Count of Damartin and I had an old account to settle."

"Ha!" said Bertrand, interested at once.

"He had been poaching my preserves, so I rode out and laid his land waste with fire and sword. He had no stomach for fighting, more's the pity, but shut himself up in his towers, and it took us three weeks to get inside."

"There at least he fought well," said Bertrand with bright eyes.

"Well enough with the walls between, but when I got in——"

He paused and licked his lips. "Man, woman, and child, we cut them down and they found hell without troubling the devil. You should have seen the flames rush up. A great deed, friend. The embers still smoulder. And the plunder——"

He went into horrible details, to which Bertrand listened keenly, putting a question here and there, and nodding appreciation now and again of the military genius which had won the day.

The recital struck a chord in memory.

"I should deem it an honor to fight at the side of such a brilliant soldier," said he courteously. "I understand that shortly you take the Cross. Now with your leave our banners shall charge the Saracen together."

"Cross!" echoed Ponthieu. "Indeed, sir, is another crusade afoot?"

"I looked to you for the news, baron. It was the abbot

of Vauvert who shouted to the holy father Pierre, that you would take the Cross."

Castelnau, who had been listening with an uneasy look on his face, here struck in.

"'Tis a crusade we preach in the north, Count Bertrand. The south will hear of it in due time."

"And will doubtless have her part in it," said the baron, smiling in a fashion that puzzled and somewhat affronted Bertrand.

"I pry into no man's secrets," said he stiffly enough.

He caught the glance between priest and baron, then the latter clapped him on the shoulder.

"No secret of mine, sir. Some state question—you understand?"

"Perfectly!" He understood nothing, and had no time then to formulate the vague suspicions arising in his mind.

The baron had turned to his lady, and was speaking again.

"To fight is good, but a man's home has its charms, and I was glad enough to see my dame once more. And she to greet her lord, eh, girl?" He pinched her white cheek in a rough, caressing way.

"Right glad. My lord knows," she murmured.

"A good wife, Count Bertrand, and a good friend to keep her safe in my absence. Come here, Guy, and know Count Bertrand of Crein, the most famous fighter in all Provence."

A tall man with a grave face stepped forward from the crowd now filling the hall. As he passed my lady she swayed a little, and the marks of her husband's finger showed in vivid crimson against a cheek whiter than before.

"Sieur Guy de Beaufoy," said the baron, "no mean

fighter himself, and a most noble gentleman, eh, my lady?" and he swung round suddenly, and fixed his eyes upon her pallid face. Bertrand saw Beaufoy's hand clench, but Rosamunde saw the courage spring into the lady's dark eyes as she answered with perfect composure, "A noble gentleman, indeed," then glanced aside with a little air of indifference absolutely perfect in all it meant to convey.

The cloud faded from her husband's face. He tapped her cheek again, then——

"To supper," he cried. "Hola, seneschal, let the feast begin."

He led Lady Rosamunde to the table, Bertrand escorted the baroness, the others followed in their appointed places. A huge salt-cellar marked the dividing line between high and low. Beneath it on their wooden stools in their several ranks, descending by degrees, sat the esquires, pages, men-at-arms, henchmen, and to-night a large gathering of both men and women from the villages which called the baron master. These latter were in such gala attire as their poverty could afford. A bunch of spring flowers to hide a rent in the leathern smock, a feather in the tattered cap, plucked from the fowl now steaming on the table. Some amongst them, more prosperous, were even decently attired in woven cloth brightened here and there with knots of ribbon.

But poor and well-to-do were alike in the common expression which marked their faces. Ill-suppressed horror, heart-tearing pain, hopeless resignation veiled every countenance in one dreadful mask, which not even the prospect of being adequately warmed and fed for once in their miserable lives could soften in the very poor, and which seemed an added cause of distress to the prosperous, who ate unwillingly and as if every bite must

choke them. Dumb and quiet they sat amongst the men of the castle, making no answer to the taunts and coarse jests which assailed them, slaves at the mercy of their master's slaves.

Count Bertrand's twenty soldiers mingled with this crowd at the feast, and here, also, sat Enid and little Margot. The child's fair prettiness shone out in startling distinction against the dark rough faces surrounding her, but she was frightened by the noise, and buried her curls in her mother's frock. Enid herself looked as sweet and fresh as the roses of her own country. More than one glance came her way from Ponthieu's men with a meaning which brought frightened anger to her eyes, and fluttering crimson to her cheeks. But she was safe enough among her own friends, and, moreover, Bûchon held a watch and ward over her and the child, which few seemed inclined to dispute, one evil-looking fellow excepted, who, leaning across the narrow board, would have laid his hand upon Enid's plump arm. Bûchon seized his fingers and twisted them until the man howled with pain to the great amusement of his friends, and his own vast discomfiture.

"You shall pay for this," he spluttered.

"Here is the coin," growled Bûchon, touching his knife.

"I'll kiss the fancy wench yet——"

A blow from Bûchon's ponderous fist ended the discussion. The man rolled off his stool amid shouts of laughter from the southerners and a murmur of curses from his own people, who had little stomach to accept an affront from Provence.

A fierce altercation arose in which recrimination came perilously nigh to blows. Enid caught Margot from the table, and stood uncertain what to do. The fallen man

rose and threw a goblet at Bûchon, who avoided it and drew his knife. The uproar grew, disturbing the baron and his guests. The former gave an order, and immediately knights, squires, and pages seized the bones remaining from the feast, and hurled them at the malcontents. The greasy shower of missiles struck full and true, heralds of more drastic punishment to come if their message went unheeded. With sullen promptness men fell back into their seats, and lowered their voices to a mutter.

Enid and Margot resumed their places, and the meal continued in the peace of a hostile truce.

Enid leaned closer to Bûchon over her child's little head.

"Again, thank you, friend," she murmured. "My own husband could not serve me better."

"Where is your man?" he asked.

"Dead these two years. Hung rotting in Winchester gallows for poaching a mangy rabbit in my lord of Tracey's warren——"

"Dead!"

His sunken eyes looked at her with a flicker of new interest. It faded, however, immediately. Such a mind was too numbed to become quickly receptive to fresh impressions.

"Dead," repeated Enid, "and I alone with the child. My lady took pity on us and fetched me to the castle to be her woman, and when she was for France, why, I said the devil should have me if I stayed behind. That's how we come to be here, Master Bûchon. And what with Red Rodolphes and Saracens and these devils here, I begin to think I'd ha' done better in Winchester, where devils truly abound, but Turks and heathens do come less."

Her eyes drooped to the child now sleeping on her arm, and a wave of terror crossed her face.

"Do you bide near us, good Bûchon," she gasped. "Do you keep Margot safe."

He only nodded, but she found comfort in his presence, and, being naturally a bright, courageous soul, presently dismissed fear for awhile and took interest in her surroundings. The villagers more especially excited her attention.

"Put a drunkard to drink water and he'd not look so forlorn," she commented. "What ails them, in heaven's name?"

" 'Tis a wedding feast," said Bûchon.

"A wedding! God save us, will they jig at a funeral?"

"With lighter hearts. Quiet, woman, you don't know——"

He broke off, and in his eyes she saw a recurrence of that agony which had seared them as he told the story of his sufferings. She remained silent a short time, then curiosity set her off again.

"Which is the bride?"

"She comes later. Now, woman, hold your peace."

She tossed her head indignantly, but the frozen horror on the faces all round found such a dreadful reflection upon his that words shriveled on her lips, and she relapsed into uneasy silence, vaguely touched herself by that dumb wave of dread in which the serfs of Ponthieu seemed engulfed.

CHAPTER IX

AT the upper end of the table above the salt, Lady Rosamunde had place on the baron's right hand, ate from his bread trenchard which served as plate, and drank from his cup. Bertrand received a like honor from the baroness, at whose other side came Foulquet, with Pierre and Alfor beyond. Sieur de Beaufoy was on Rosamunde's right, and after him on the one side and after Alfor on the other the various knights ranged themselves with due regard to their precedence. A serving man stood behind the baron's chair, and one behind his lady, each holding a great waxen candle in naked uplifted arms. The burning grease ran down upon their bare skin, and drops of agony ran down their tortured faces.

Bertrand looked an inquiry at his host, who answered carelessly.

"The hounds lost my finest bitch in a swamp. At any other time they should have been hanged, but to-night calls for mercy, therefore, I am only hardening them a little to endure the future torments of damnation, to which such villains must surely come."

He threw a bone to one of the dogs prowling near the table, and with his fingers took another piece of meat from the pot which was passing round.

"This feast is meant to celebrate two joys, Lady Rosamunde. Your presence adds a third. First, then, reunion with my dear wife—thirdly, to put the last second,

your arrival, and, secondly, the marriage of my chief huntsman with the prettiest girl in the domain."

The meal continued until repletion exhausted capacity. The heavy wines and heady ciders had passed frequently. With the exception of the baroness and Lady Rosamunde, who had only touched water, of Count Bertrand, whose prudence was too seasoned to let him get drunk in a strange house, and of Guy of Beaufoy, who had his own reasons for keeping sober, every man had taken more than his fill.

The clergy were no mean performers either. Pierre of Castelnau nodded heavily on his stool, Brother Alfor still sat erect, but the cowl had fallen from his shorn head, and his eyes gleamed strangely. As for Foulquet, he drank cup for cup with the baron, and had slightly the better of it in steadiness when the company left the table and adjourned to the upper end of the hall.

One of the men holding the burning candles uttered a groan, and sank unconscious to the floor. The tipsy crowd noisily removing the supper dishes paid no further attention than stamping out the burning rushes where the falling light had caught them, and rolling the inert body into a corner out of the way. The second, with his arms and chest cruelly blistered, waited until the baron should put a term to his suffering, which the latter, at a whisper from his lady, and having more interesting business on hand, did with a careless nod. The poor wretch extinguished the candle and staggered away, to moan the night through on his filthy straw mattress. There were many such inarticulate cries arising throughout feudal Europe at that time, but the thirteenth century lived so entirely in the present of its ignorant cruelty that it gave no thought to the harvest others should reap from its sowing—would have stared in amazement

at the man who might have uttered such a warning—indeed, lacked the intelligence to grasp such a meaning. It took, in France, the stupendous upheaval of the Revolution six hundred years later to finally destroy the shameful rights of the nobles which this wedding feast in Ponthieu Castle demonstrated so fully in the year 1208 of the "good old times."

The baron was drunk, but retained his faculties. Wine loosened his tongue in amorous declaration to his lady. A more refined age would be shocked. Then, such manners were accepted naturally in the rougher north, but Lady Rosamunde, glancing from the baroness's frozen face to Count Bertrand, saw his frown, and at the same moment he caught her look.

"You shall yet learn in Provence how a gentleman woos a lady," he whispered. "This dog outrages the very name of love."

It seemed less a remark to her than an expression of his own disgust, since he turned his eyes away, not waiting for an answer. Therefore, he missed her violent start, nor heard her faint "Oh," as something burnt upon the nape of her neck where the square cut of her gown left its whiteness bare. Positive that a fiery hand had been laid upon her, she looked round indignant, to meet the strange gaze of Alfor the monk.

"A spark from the fire, my daughter. Have no fear, it is gone," he said.

He also was drunk, but not with wine. That had but disclosed his drunkenness. Lady Rosamunde shrank away from him, then pride rescued her from alarm.

"I thank you, father," and her tones cut like ice, and her eyes shone as calm and cold as frozen water, quenching the fire in his. He mumbled under his breath, and drew back. She turned from him, and for

all her pride moved nearer to Bertrand with a very humbled sensation of protection.

The swish of her long gown about his feet drew his attention from the baroness, who had eluded her husband, and was staring expectantly at the lower door through which the wedding party now streamed.

"Did you ever see tragedy written plainer on a human face?" whispered Bertrand. "Hush——"

The baron had advanced to meet the bride and groom. Immediately his wife stepped close to the Sieur of Beaufoy, who stood at Bertrand's elbow.

Oh, the look that passed between the baron's wife and the baron's friend! In their extremity neither heeded Bertrand and Lady Rosamunde. 'Tis likely they did not even notice their presence. One great fear obliterated all minor dangers.

"Are you certain you can manage him? If not, either he or I will not live through the night," muttered Guy.

"Leave it to me," came her fierce whisper. "To-night I can fool him, or——" she drew in her breath, and touched the dagger in her girdle. "Oh, love, I have been in paradise. Am I the woman to go back to hell?"

She smiled wildly into his distraught face, and glided away as her husband turned, and with the bride and her groom on either hand advanced up the hall. The mask fell again over Sieur of Beaufoy's countenance. Lady Rosamunde shot a quick glance at Bertrand, but there was no time for speech.

The baron and baroness had taken their seats. The knights and pages ranged themselves in a semicircle on either hand. Bishop Foulquet and Pierre of Castelnau both wore frowns. Neither was too drunk to misunderstand what was on foot, and, though fanatics, each believed in his cause, and knew how much foundation

the revolt against the Church had in the revolt against such foul tyranny as they should witness now, but which they made no effort to restrain. Rome needed the help of northern France, and her policy did not lie in trying to withhold a noble from his privileges.

The crowd of men-at-arms, serving men and villagers filled the lower part of the hall, surging to and fro as the pressure gave and closed, advancing cautiously, with heads thrust forward, and ears strained to catch all that passed. The look of terror stamped on the faces of the villagers deepened, carving their features into grotesque masks of fearful doubt and pain, but the soldiers and huntsmen and the castle hinds laughed coarsely amongst themselves, with nods and winks, uttering obscene jests, taunting the men and women from the village, and obviously gloating over their distress.

Bertrand's men had gathered together not far from their master. Enid and Margot stood with them, Bûchon close by, and in the space between the nobility at the upper end of the hall, and the scum or base-born at the lower, were two figures upon whom every eye was bent.

A man, young, vigorous, alert, well set up, too, in his green leathern jerkin, a horn slung about his shoulders, a hunting knife bound to his side. In his hand he carried his green cap with its heron wing. Fair curls clustered over his head; his eyes were gray and honest. Decidedly a handsome man in the first prime of youth, and he faced his lord as steadily as he had faced a wild animal at bay more than a hundred times in the perils of the chase. Yet for all his courage, it was doubtful if his breath had ever come so quickly before the risk of death at a boar's tusks, as it came now before the overlord whose consent he must buy to his wedding.

The bride was very young, very slender, with a crown

of hair the color of a ripe chestnut and large blue eyes shining out of a lovely little face. She wore a simple white dress, girdled with a white silk cord. A golden fillet bound her head, leaving the mass of her hair rippling unconfined to her waist. In her hand she bore a sheaf of lilies, and in her youth, her purity and her beauty, she shone fairer and whiter than the flowers themselves.

White, indeed! Every vestige of color had drained from her cheeks, and she trembled so violently that but for her lover's arm she seemed likely to fall. He held her to his heart and whispered in her ear, but it was dreadful to see how that look of terror on the faces of the villagers had struck her also, blighting her fresh beauty as with a curse.

There they stood, a target for every gaze. Sinister amusement and the dawn of a horrible gloating in Ponthieu's eyes, feverish impatience on his lady's face, disapproval of the clergy, intense anxiety of Sieur de Beaufoy, half careless, half-deprecatory interest of Count Bertrand and uneasy bewilderment of Lady Rosamunde. All this, and the cruel eagerness of the squires and pages with the quivering excitement of their low-born fellows, was focussed upon them in one flaming scrutiny to be endured until it pleased the baron to address them.

At last he spoke. "Greeting, Charles, my huntsman, and greeting, fair Blanche of Arroy. This morning you two were wed, so my dear lady tells me, and now are come to ask my consent to the marriage."

"May it please your lordship, yes," answered Charles very clearly.

"The bride is well dowered, I understand."

Here my lady interrupted with cruel scorn.

"White silk to her back and gold crown to her hair!

My lord, how shall the châtelaine dress when her serfs go so finely attired?"

The girl raised her head. "Your pardon, my lady," she faltered. "I am daughter of Sieur Arroy, who was free even as his lordship." Her head drooped again to her lover's shoulder. If only she had been less fair in her distress! If the bloom of the flower in its rarity of perfection had not appealed so strongly to the jaded senses of a brute who set no limit to his caprices, nor bounds to the fulfilment of his desires!

"Sieur Arroy was free, was he? As free as myself!" And the baron laughed low and very mockingly, and the wine he had drunk raced through his veins and shot fire from the eyes bent upon Blanche, the huntsman's bride. Hers, down-drooping in shame and terror, did not receive this assault, but her young husband caught it upon the shield of his protection, and repulsed it bravely enough.

"Your lordship knows Sieur Arroy was your free-born vassal, holding his lands in his own right."

"I know—I know." The baron nodded affably. "And what of you, friend, who most indisputably are my serf?"

"Sir, the daughter of a freeman is a freewoman and, marrying, gives freedom to her husband. I am no more a slave——"

He knelt suddenly at his wife's feet, clasping her hands in his.

"God wot I am your slave, dear heart, my white Queen Doe, who has stooped to one of the lowest in the herd."

A murmur surged through the hall. He was so gallant and she so fair that for a moment the roughest hearts thrilled in sympathy.

"She'll make you King of the Forest, lad, never fear, with a fawn for every antler of your crown," cried a voice.

A roar of laughter arose. Charles sprang to his feet, laughing, too.

"Will you look up, wife?" he whispered. "'Tis but their way—they mean no offence."

But the approval of the low-born did not find general reflection among the noble. Purple the baron's countenance, and swollen the veins on his forehead. Stupefied his lady's face, whitely dismayed beneath the storm of anger gathering in her breast. Greatly disturbed, also, and chagrined the knightly retinue, the insolent squires and pages who saw their sport escaping unharmed. Far from pleasant the craving hungry eyes of Guy of Beaufoy staring from his overlord to that lord's wife.

And Lady Rosamunde with the cold eyes and small red mouth? Too great a lady to be much concerned over the affairs of her inferiors; yet, perhaps, woman enough to be interested in such love as now unfolded itself before her. She turned to Bertrand, whose face at least beamed approval.

"'Tis a romance that suits my taste," said he.

"Romance indeed, yet the girl has stooped below her station."

"And thereby lifted both to heaven. How low would you bend to love, Lady Rosamunde?"

Did he mock her? Their quarrel still rankled overgreen in memory to warrant this confidential tone.

"I look up, sir, not down," said she proudly.

"Do you seek an archangel, madam? For by my faith, from the pinnacle whereon you sit you must needs stoop to even the worthiest among mere men."

She flushed in anger at his mockery, but had no time to answer. Ponthieu was speaking.

"Will you throw the law in my face?" said he, very smoothly. His fury had deepened from choking passion

into a far more deadly white-heat of cruel rage wherein every refinement of punishment lay sharply defined. "My knowledge must correct your ignorance, Charles. The Sieur of Arroy was free indeed, but did he not marry a serf on my father's domain? Marrying a serf, he, also, lost his freedom. His lands and his person became the property of Ponthieu, therefore, his child is also my slave, and I have my rights in her person."

CHAPTER X

SUCH was the law framed to satisfy the greed of the nobles. It did not matter that both Henry of Arroy and his wife were dead years before. The law became retrospective to suit personal convenience. It fell now like a thunderbolt upon Charles and his young bride. With a low moan she sank upon her knees, covering her face. He stood erect, but pale, and with his manly confidence perishing beneath his master's gaze.

"Is—that—indeed—the law, my lord?" he asked, in a curious halting fashion. Each word struggled for utterance in the sea of fear engulfing him.

"That is the law."

Savage exultation shone on the baron's face. A dull murmur echoed round the hall. The castle folk laughed, rejoicing that sport would not fail them after all. The baroness relaxed her strained attitude. Lady Rosamunde's breath came quicker. What was to follow?

The blight of those other faces had struck Charles now. He looked old and withered. His eyes were dull, set in a leaden face. His glance traveled down to the figure crouching at his feet. She was a slave. He, also, was a slave—neither man nor woman, but just "things" of flesh and blood to be used by a master. Used—broken—and she was his wife—Mother of Heaven!

There was no help. He might spring upon the baron

and kill him before any one could prevent the thrust. His hand touched his knife—fell from it. What would happen to the parricide's wife.[1]

He moved forward, his head bowed beneath the load of this public shame. And the looks cast upon his white lily, down now in the dust, yet not so low as she must come, if the ransom were not accepted! The lascivious glances, the obscene jests, the coarse taunts, all burning her purity into scarlet dishonor! Oh, saints of heaven! Fire scorched his brain. Saints? Oh, devils of hell, strike them dead, strike the cold smile from off the lips of the baron's wife.

The baroness! All Ponthieu knew how she had betrayed her lord. And she smiled, well content with this new fancy of his which should blind him to her guilt. No help there.

He turned haggard eyes upon the priests of Holy Church, but the bishop and Father Pierre were staring into the fire, and Alfor the monk was staring at a woman. No help there.

He had no clear knowledge of his petition. An offer of so many sheep, so much corn to ransom his wife's honor—a wild appeal for clemency—then dumb despair, and the hall ringing with shouts of laughter. And always in the center of that picture the prone white figure of his wife beneath her veil of hair.

"It is not enough," said the lord.

"I have no more," said the slave.

Fresh shouts rose upon the air.

"*Fi donc,* Charles, never frown. 'Tis an honor our lord does you—your eldest son shall yet call a nobleman father."

[1] In feudal law the overlord was held as the father of his serfs. The punishment for parricide was singularly terrible.

The sweat poured down his ashen face. He thrust forward his hands in appeal.

"My lord, I have served you well. Let us go in peace. She is my wife——" He stopped. The human voice has not been framed to express all the agony the human soul can endure.

"She shall be your wife—to-morrow," said the baron.

Another roar of laughter.

Lady Rosamunde turned to Bertrand.

"What is it?" he whispered, amazed at her troubled face.

"I cannot bear it. I will ransom the girl. Her plight cries shame upon my womanhood."

Her hands unfastened the pearl-studded golden fillet binding her hair, which, released, fell in soft black clouds below her knees. Her gray eyes shone with a strange glow. A new birth was blurring their cold light into warmer mistiness, and Bertrand drew in his breath at the sight.

"Par die," he muttered, "a woman, after all."

"Take the coif," she commanded. "It is the girl's dower, and will ransom her."

Bertrand hesitated. "We can scarcely interfere between the baron and his people. Wait now, lady——"

He leaned forward on his stool and spoke to Ponthieu.

"A miserable slip of a girl. They told me in Paris that Ponthieu is held the best judge of a woman's looks in all the country side."

"Well, sir?" Ponthieu was curt, resenting the interruption.

"By my faith, with such a rose growing in my garden, I'd not slight her for a weed."

Ponthieu's eyes followed his to the dazzling beauty of his wife. Indecision wavered across his face. The bar-

oness saw it and whitened. She had heard Bertrand's words.

"Such glory of hair, such marvel of skin, eyes like pools of fire, lips as fresh and ripe as the first kiss of love! Your pardon, my lady, but such loveliness would set the greatest poets in Provence on fire to sing its praise."

Thus spoke Count Bertrand, and Ponthieu smiled, well pleased, and Charles held his breath, while the people murmured softly, and the fate of Blanche of Arroy hung in the balance.

Sieur Guy of Beaufoy cursed the meddling Provençal under his breath, but the baroness rose from her chair and swept a curtsy to her champion.

"I thank you for such tribute to the poor charms which seemingly fail now to please my liege lord." She spoke in ringing accents which carried to the farthest end of the hall. "My lord of Ponthieu, you have shamed me indeed this day, that a stranger must needs rebuke you publicly for the slight you put upon me."

"Rebuke me!" flamed Ponthieu, all taken aback by her outburst.

"Ay, for the insult of your preference for a serf. But have a care, my lord, you shall not slight Ermengarde of Vaucennes so easily."

How skillfully she played upon her instrument! The purple blood darkened Ponthieu's face.

"Will you threaten me, you, my wife and chattel, and that before my people?" he thundered. "Hold your peace, woman, lest harm come upon you."

She flung out her arms.

"My lord, I entreat you! Am I not your wife? You will not wrong me on this very night of your return. Send this *canaille* away, dear lord. You will not! Then

by my virtue, the people of Ponthieu shall learn the truth from me."

She swung round upon the crowd, a wonderful picture in her green silk gown with those tawny ropes of hair falling upon her white breast, and her strange eyes flaming in the snow of her face.

"Henry of Arroy married a freewoman from my fief of Vaucennes, therefore their child is free by law——"

Her husband leaped to his feet, blaspheming in his fury, and struck her cruelly to the ground.

An uproar immediately filled the hall. Guy of Beaufoy bounded forward, but the baroness had risen to her knees, and the smile on her face checked him. She had done her work. Ponthieu was caught in the trap of his pride.

He glared upon the crowd and it shrank back trembling. He lifted up his hand and immediately the noise ceased.

"*I* am the law in Ponthieu," he bellowed. "Men, women and children, you are all mine to hold and to have, to sell and to slay, to feed and to starve. Let a man desire a maid, and he has dared to covet my property. Now what dog among you can claim aught better than his master's leavings? Yet you, Charles, my serf, would lay hands upon the very fairest flower in all Ponthieu. *Par la tête Dieu,* you may thank St. Hubert for the huntsman's craft which keeps you from swinging on the battlements this night."

He leaped forward and caught Blanche up into his arms, and when Charles, mad with despair, sprang at him, he dashed him back upon the crowd.

"Will you teach me the law, you hound? A king's ransom would not buy her from me now."

She stirred in his arms, moaned, and opened her eyes.

Ponthieu laid a brutal hand upon the whiteness of her neck. Her shriek mingled with the rasping cry which burst from her husband's throat. Who heard their agony? So many screams of equal pain were shrilling up from feudal Europe to an unresponsive heaven that like enough their voices became lost in that multitude, even as they were lost in the yells and shouts which now echoed through the halls of Ponthieu. A swarm of men rushed between Charles and the baron. One last despairing shriek in his ears, one last flutter of her white robe disappearing through an archway that led to a tower above—then the crowd was upon him, jeering, shouting taunting him. Hustled hither, driven there, beaten, buffeted, hearing from every side the shameful epithet which mocked his loss, the wretched man was borne upon that wave of bestial amusement out of the castle, over the drawbridge, and cast upon the grass beyond the outer walls. Here, shattered and well-nigh unconscious, they left him alone under the quiet stars to think.

The villagers passed him on the way to their wretched hovels, but no one paused beside him. Fear partly held them back, but most of them recognized the superhuman quality of the suffering he endured. Only God or the devil could do aught here! Those who in their turn had descended into such a hell, shrugged their shoulders apathetically, those who saw the same path yawning upon them, hurried on in dread. The soft blackness of night was broken by the shining stars. Not the faintest glimmer broke the black fate of these people, helpless victims, doomed from cradle to grave to the hideous tyranny of the times in which they lived.

The banqueting hall emptied quickly as the crowd swarmed out in the harrying of its prey. The baroness had vanished. Sieur Guy of Beaufoy, captain of the

guard that night, was at his post at the main gate. Only Bertrand and his party remained, forgotten, it seemed, in the confusion. To them presently came Ponthieu's seneschal and called Bertrand aside.

"My lord, it would be wise to keep your men this side of the door. You have women to shield, and I tell you that to-night in Ponthieu there is a fever abroad which sets men to madness. Bolt the door securely, sir count. I pray its strength may hold dishonor from our roof."

Bertrand thanked him for the warning, and he withdrew to use what influence he possessed to send the hot spirits of Ponthieu to their rest. Under Bertrand's orders the massive door of the banqueting hall and the smaller door in the archway were fastened and a man placed on guard before each. The rest of the soldiers flung themselves down upon the rushes, and were soon asleep. Bishop Foulquet, Father Pierre, and Alfor stretched themselves in an alcove upon one side of the hall. In another Bûchon heaped rushes together to make a soft couch for Enid and little Margot, and covered them both with his own cloak. And what the man had done for the maid, the master did for the mistress, spreading his scarlet velvet mantle over the rushes which should bear her dainty burden. A carved wooden screen stood against the wall. Gaston the page drew it forward in such a way as to secure her privacy, and then Bertrand approached where she leaned in one of the deep window recesses, gazing out into the night with troubled eyes. She turned at his step.

"Sir!"

"Will you not sleep, lady?"

She looked past him toward the arched doorway. The walls of Ponthieu keep guarded well the tragedy of the night. No shrieks could pierce their thickness. Such a

silence was more ghastly than the most dreadful cries to those who understood the sacrifice being immolated behind it.

"I cannot sleep," said Lady Rosamunde.

His eyes were curious.

"Will you fret over such a custom? Most ladies would find the girl honored by the baron's favor."

"You defend him?" Her light eyes gleamed in the shadows of that dusky hair. "You—you, too, perhaps, have—so honored the women of your fief."

"No," said Bertrand of Crein, snapping the simple negative through his strong teeth with the curt ring men had learned to accept unquestioningly as truth, even as Rosamunde of Tracey accepted it now. She moved forward a little. The moon rising high in heaven sent a silver ray through the unglazed window to play upon her beauty, and where it touched her hair that became a shining ebon glory about her face.

"I remember that but for you, Count Bertrand, I should also be a prisoner this night—to Rodolphe de Verlay. That may be the reason I suffer so in poor Blanche's torment."

Was the fever abroad in Ponthieu infecting him, that such words should then escape his lips?

"Can you feel so deeply? You who have not loved!"

She stopped and looked at him.

"A child of sixteen wedded to a man of fifty! Henry of Tracey was your husband, never your lover," he said.

The face of Guy of Beaufoy flashed into memory. If he were a lover, Tracey had not been one for her. And she herself—— It seemed that she had yet a lesson to learn, seemed, also, that this knight from Provence had perceived her ignorance. His blue eyes shone into hers, but the veil of hair enshrouding her was not thicker than

the mystery which shrouds a woman's heart from the understanding of a man.

"You will learn, but who will teach you?" whispered Count Bertrand, in the moonlight.

She stared at him, making no answer. A moonbeam danced on to her full parted lips, and trembled there like a kiss. Then she had gone. The screen hid her from him, and his vigil commenced.

* * * * * * *

He shared the watches of the night with Bûchon at the latter's own request.

"I cannot sleep, lord, and your men are weary."

Bertrand nodded silently. He knew what a hell of memory kept this man awake. He himself slept fitfully. Once a movement from the corner where the three priests lay, roused him. The torches still flickered on the walls. Half asleep as he was, it seemed to him that a figure rose to its knees and stretching out its hands toward the screen, uttered a fierce hard sob of anguish. Then he saw another figure come swiftly from the shadows of the hall and touch the man who had cried out. The latter sank back on to the rushes, and the torchlight shone upon the face of Alfor the monk, and Bûchon who had heard his cry.

"A bad dream. Such a dog must have ample store to furnish them," thought Bertrand, then dropped into a sounder slumber until Bûchon roused him as he had commanded.

"Will you not sleep, lord? I cannot," he said again.

"That may be, but I fall into no slack habits," answered Bertrand, rising. "At least you may rest, man."

The blackness of night was yielding swiftly to the gray of dawn. Bertrand groped his way toward a window.

Bûchon followed him. From across the courtyard came a creaking sound, and the faint rattle of chains.

"What now!" muttered Bertrand, but the darkness baffled his straining vision. He could not see the lowered drawbridge, nor the two muffled horsemen who crossed it and disappeared through the outer gateway into the gloom beyond. "The Sieur de Beaufoy and his page riding forth at the baron's commands," said the sergeant to the guard as he bade them pull up the bridge.

The horses danced upon the springy turf under the forest trees. Knight and page shook their bridles and gallopped towards the dawn.

CHAPTER XI

THE sun rose in brilliance over Ponthieu the next morning. His sublime indifference shone alike upon the inequalities of the world, greeted the half-demented woman thrust through the postern gate into her husband's shaking arms, lit the eyes of Lady Rosamunde riding through the forest in the sweet freshness of early morning.

The night had passed undisturbed, and Bertrand lost no time in starting the day's journey. It was the seneschal who saw them properly fed, and bade them Godspeed, with many apologies for his master's absence. Bertrand cut him short. He was not enamored of the baron, while Lady Rosamunde shrank from the idea of seeing him again. Bishop Foulquet probably felt relieved from the necessity of admonition.

So the little party, glad to turn its back upon the tragedy of Ponthieu, went forth into the spring-scented day. The air was mild. Soft white clouds broke upon the blue sky. The trees were verdant with the promise of life throbbing from sap to bud. Flowers spread a variegated carpet upon the ground—a patch of blue where the bluebells sang their fairy music, a gleam of yellow primroses to gladden the eye, a dash of orange lifting the subdued beauty into a blaze of color where the aconite burst forth upon the green, and sweet anemones blushing warmly pink at their own loveliness.

A blackbird sang his rapture in their ears, a thrush piped his music up to heaven. "The glory of life," sang the birds; "the strength of life," called the trees; "the beauty of life," chanted the flowers; "the freshness of life," foamed the brook.

Bertrand rode bareheaded, his helmet fastened to the saddle. His eyes were bright, his full lips parted a little over his white teeth, as he breathed in the sparkling air. Strong and alert, he made a very gallant figure in his black mail armor and rose-embroidered yellow surcoat. Lady Rosamunde went by his side. She put back her hood and drank deeply at the magic filter of this wonderful morning. Gloomy thoughts were dispelled by the uprushing spring of life around her. For a while she forgot the horror of last night.

"It is a perfect day," said she.

"I'd ask no better of heaven," said Bertrand.

Heresy again, but the bishop and his brethren rode behind, out of earshot, and she had no mind that morning to rebuke. Perhaps Bertrand read her thoughts.

"Why not, madam? What says the Psalmist. 'The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.' May He not glorify His own?"

"Why—so it may be," she agreed. "Yet does not the Church teach that this very loveliness is but the snare of Satan to win our thoughts from heaven?"

"I am no theologian, lady. The breeze has kissed a pink into your cheeks that shames the wind-flowers themselves."

Where was her wounded pride? If she summoned it, the call went unheeded. She only laughed into his smiling eyes.

"Are you all poets in Languedoc, Count Bertrand?"

"When inspired by such a theme."

She smiled mischievously, and the most provoking dimple wantoned in her cheek.

"Such poetry may have another name—even flattery."

"Or yet another—even truth."

What spell had loosened the spring of her youth, and set the blood dancing so merrily in her veins? She leaned toward him, and shook the hair from her eyes.

"I have been warned against the ready tongue of Provence."

"As against its morals."

She flushed then and bit her lip. It seemed he did not forget too easily, perhaps scorned her for her unbending. He had been brutal—yet had meant to shield her. Strong natures did not always pick and choose their words. She shot a glance at him. He was strong. God wot, here was a man a woman might lean on. And quick to understand, for had not she herself shrunk from the eyes of Alfor the monk.

But brutal! Yet how soft his voice last night in the moonlight. And the music of it! That curious upward lilt!

Moreover, had he not fought in her defence? How base her return!

In halting accents, strangely at variance with her usual composure, she made her apology. If she expected a disclaimer from his courtesy, she was disappointed. He listened in silence to the end, then looked her very straightly in the eyes.

"That was my due," he said. She caught her breath. His eyes held her insistently, and her pride met his with understanding. *Noblesse oblige.*

"Yes," she said.

He took her gloved hand and kissed it. "With all

my heart I thank you for this graciousness. Now, God send that I may die in your service."

"You shall serve me better living," laughed Rosamunde.

Surely no sun had ever shone so wonderfully before.

Hark! What bell clashed out upon the quiet? What were those cries borne to them from the distance?

Hastily Bertrand went to the rear of his troop. Did treachery come from Ponthieu? Scarcely with a herald. Yet in prudence he made such skillful disposition of his men as should repel attack. They had no long wait. Through the forest glade came men riding in furious gallop, Henri of Ponthieu at their head. He rode as one possessed, and his face was like a devil. Grimly he went, silent, sweeping past Bertrand and his men without a sign. Plainly his business lay further ahead.

Now what quarry had the lord of Ponthieu come out to chase?

The last horse stumbled and brought its rider down at Bertrand's feet. As he leaped up, Bertrand recognized his friend the seneschal.

"What's afoot?" asked he.

"Naught save myself," answered the rueful seneschal. "But treachery and dishonor are on the wing, and murder red-hot pursues. Last night the Lady Ermengarde and her lover, Guy of Beaufoy, fled from Ponthieu, and 'tis thought they make for my lady's fief of Vaucennes." He scrambled back into the saddle, and galloped after his companions.

The others resumed their journey with sufficient food for reflection, the chestnut mare ever keeping pace with Black King. Foulquet and Pierre conversed anxiously. They were too deeply interested in Ponthieu to be care-

less of his safety. Bûchon rode by the side of Brother Alfor, who had not opened his lips since leaving the castle. Little Margot on her pony trotted between Bûchon and her mother. A wreath of anemones and bluebells crowned her yellow curls. The page, Gaston of Nîmes, turned often in his saddle to catch her smile, and flash his answer. He was a handsome lad of fifteen, boasting one of the oldest names in all Provence, but youth sets no boundary between friendships, and already the high-born boy and the little serf maiden claimed the other's comradeship.

Bertrand's thoughts were busy. Remembering the noise heard in the courtyard as he and Bûchon kept watch that morning, he knew now when the baroness and her lover had gone. He himself had started an hour later. Ponthieu swept past in pursuit half an hour afterwards, and Vaucennes lay twenty miles distant. A woman at least would need a rest, the horses must be breathed.

"The chances are that we shall come upon an interesting situation," said Bertrand, aloud.

Lady Rosamunde only nodded. Her thoughts, too, were filled, speculating upon this woman who risked so much for love, wondering curiously what this love might be which set men and women to such madness.

"Now if it came my way, should I also fling everything aside for its sake?" she pondered. Then in her pride of race and in her untried integrity, she judged the woman and condemned.

Bertrand saw the tightening of her lips and shrewdly read her mind.

"You blame the baroness?" he said.

"Why, yes. Is she not false to Holy Church, her husband, and herself?"

"The first two I grant you, but to the third she has been true—most likely."

"An adulteress! True to her adultery!"

"True to her woman's soul, and not strong enough to crucify it."

She looked shocked and troubled.

"Would you excuse her?"

"At least I will not judge her and—by Apollo, I envy the man for whom a woman will dare so much."

Her lip curled. "Truly the baroness is very fair."

"With brains to match her beauty. How deftly she turned her husband to her wishes!"

"Will you praise her also for sacrificing that poor girl?"

"Her serf, valued less than the peregrine upon her wrist. What value do you put on your people's welfare?"

"So that they serve me well——"

"Ay, you suffer them. But let one stand between you and your desires——"

Her eyes flashed.

"She would go, but I'd use no serf to shield my dishonor."

"Spoken like a—man."

His smile disarmed annoyance.

"Will you allow no honor to a woman?"

The twinkle in his eyes deepened.

"Let her have beauty, spirit, and tenderness, but for love's sake, let her not be overburdened by her conscience."

"You jest, Count Bertrand!"

"Surely!"

His eyes baffled her.

"Would you not have her virtuous?"

"A very icicle to all the world save her lover—your pardon, lady, I speak as a troubadour."

"You relieve me, sir. Were you serious, yesterday's reproof for the honor I had insulted becomes absurd, and my apology a vanity."

"You used personalities, madam."

"And you!"

She was crimson, remembering that admonition concerning Lancelot and Guinevere.

"Have I not said—as a troubadour?"

The color faded from her cheeks, and she was rude after the manner of her time.

"Yesterday a fire, to-day a fool. I cannot judge such a man."

"After three days? Heaven forbid! Indeed, I would not be so shallow. You shall judge me when you know me."

"Why, sir, but for the need of your escort, I would cry, 'Lord save me from a further acquaintance.'"

"You shall confirm those words at our journey's end—if you can in honesty."

This time she would not answer his smile, but relapsed into frozen silence. Bertrand, however, seemed no whit abashed. He rode on whistling gaily with never a glance at her, and after a while she was ashamed of her temper but too proud to admit it. She should have met his humor, given chaff for chaff. It was not to be expected that a Provençal knight, steeped in the immoralities of his country, could understand the seriousness of a staider nation. Folly to be angry with such a trifler. After all, deeds, not words, maintained virtue, and she felt very sure of her strength. In the meantime, since she must travel in his company for weeks to come, it was decidedly more pleasant to pass the time away in talk and laughter

than to feel it drag in this stupid silence. Even a quarrel were better than such monotony.

So much for pride that her thoughts made her traitor to it. But there she called "halt." It was not for her to speak first. Rather let him turn to her and she would answer.

Truly three days were all too short in which to know this man, who showed no desire to look at her, or to speak. His indifference so galled her that likely enough she would have lost the mute contest by bursting forth into some biting speech, had not a sudden twist of the forest revealed a scene which drove away all thoughts save for itself, and brought the party to a swift halt.

The men of Ponthieu, who had passed them but fifteen minutes since, were grouped in a ring round an open glade, sitting motionless upon their horses. The seneschal held the rein of his master's horse, and the eyes of all were glued upon two figures who grappled with each other on foot. A third figure in gray trunk and hose grasped the bridles of two other horses, whose heaving flanks told the story of their race. Lady Ermengarde's white face stared from beneath the page's cap, and her gaze never wavered from her husband and her lover swaying in that death-grip—for her

"Par die," cried Bertrand, and his face flamed, "a goodly fight, I swear."

Foulquet spurred forward.

"I adjure you to succor the baron," he commanded.

"Not so," answered Bertrand, "the quarrel is none of mine."

"But Ponthieu may be slain."

"Let him take his chance."

"Will you not aid him against that adulterer?" cried Foulquet, raging.

"Less than you aided him last night against a helpless girl, holy father."

Foulquet ground his teeth, but found no reply. Yet Ponthieu dead would mean a heavy loss to the work Rome had in hand.

"Help him," he insisted, while his fingers twitched at his own sword. "The Church lays her command upon you."

"It weighs lightly," grinned Bertrand, and as the bishop tried to pass him, barred the way.

Foulquet uttered an imprecation. It was echoed by a shout from the soldiers, as one of the struggling men fell to the ground and moved no more.

Another shout, followed by an ominous growl, and Ponthieu's men swung forward to avenge their dead master. Bertrand gave an order, but before he could interfere, the lady of Ponthieu had stepped between her lover and those who would have slain him.

"Back, fools. You may not meddle here," she said, and they halted and stared from her strange face to one another, overawed by her great spirit. The seneschal dismounted, and looked at her across the body of her husband. He was an old man, broken by horror. The sword fell from his nerveless hand, tears oozed from his wrinkled lids.

"Christ save us, my lady, there will be a price to pay."

"Good seneschal, the best costs ever the most. What price shall be too high for a heart's desire?" and she flung a smile of triumph at her lover, who was wiping Ponthieu's blood from the dagger which had killed him.

A man came forward from among the baron's followers. He was tall and dark, and his eyes gleamed with avarice.

"Ponthieu shall be the price of Beaufoy's life. I am next of kin if you yield the fief."

Bertrand heard the words and rode to her side. Behind him came Lady Rosamunde and the priests.

"May I not hold it for you, madam?" he asked, bowing low.

"I thank you, sir, but I have escaped from hell. Count Gregory, the fief is yours. Carry your cousin back to Ponthieu and give him burial, and Christ pardon him for the blood upon my hands."

Then Pierre of Castelnau and Alfor the monk dismounting, knelt by the body, and began reciting the prayers for the dead. The bishop sat erect upon his horse. Lady Rosamunde bowed her head. Guy of Beaufoy leaned upon his sword, but the baroness stood upright, her slim figure sharply silhouetted in the clear light, feminine defiance incarnate, rejoicing in the love which held the world well lost for love's delight.

Lady Rosamunde, looking up from prayer, met her eyes. For a while the two women stared at each other —she who had lost the world and her own soul—she who still had both to lose. The baroness, in gray doublet and hose, her face grimed with dust, two long snaky coils of red hair falling from her page's cap, two strange eyes burning in the grayness of her small face, moved close to the chestnut horse and looked up at the Lady Rosamunde.

"He is my man," she exclaimed, as if to answer Rosamunde, who had spoken no word. "Now in this world there is only one man for one woman, and but one woman for one man. And before ever they meet in the flesh, their souls cry to each other, so that when they come together their lives must answer the cry of their souls or the meaning of life withers. Thus it

happened to us—too late. We had to choose between hell to come and hell on earth. Thus we chose." She made a sweeping gesture toward the dead man. "Oh, woman, you who have not yet learned to live, pray you meet your man in good time to save you from such a choice."

Her mocking eyes burned the whiteness of Rosamunde's face, and she, fascinated, could not move her own.

"And if you also have to pay, pay as I do—with a laugh."

She was laughing as she stepped back and turned to Bertrand.

"I am sorry that Vaucennes may not shelter you to-night, Count Bertrand of Crein, but you will find hospitality at the Benedictine Abbey not fifteen miles from here. It pays dues to the fief."

"I know it," said Foulquet darkling, "and it knows me. Murderess and adulteress, you and this murderer, your paramour, shall be excommunicated from to-night. Vaucennes shall wither in outer darkness, cut off from the blessings of the Church. No sacrament, no unction——"

"But liberty and love!" she cried, and not a man there, save Foulquet and Pierre, but caught his breath at her beauty and worshipped her courage. Beaufoy turned upon Foulquet.

"Have a care," he said, with menace. "I am in no mind to brook such interference." Blood mingled with the sweat of his face, his breath came quick and short, his eyes were savage. He stood before them all, primeval man fighting for his mate.

He glared at Bertrand.

"The fight was fair."

"I saw," returned Bertrand quietly.

Beaufoy looked from him to the angry bishop, then back to Bertrand.

"He lies in the dust, where he threw her last night. All of you saw the blow. And it was not the first. He tortured her. I love her."

"I would do the same myself," said Bertrand.

"Murderer are you, Guy of Beaufoy, and heretic is Bertrand of Crein," struck in Foulquet, with red-hot passion. "And this woman is a murderess——"

She flung out her hands as if striking the name from her.

"Spare your reproaches, holy father. That man," pointing to Ponthieu's silent figure, "defaced God's image in me, and made me what I am."

"Blasphemy!" shrieked Pierre, but Bertrand, roughly enough, bade him hold his tongue, and get on his mule if he would not be left behind. A sharp order to the men-at-arms brought them between the baroness and the anathemas of the Church. Slowly the troop passed by carrying the three priests with it, despite their protests. Bertrand came behind. Lady Rosamunde, very pale, and trembling in her saddle, bent down as she passed the Lady Ermengarde.

"Heaven help you, sister-woman," she whispered.

Was her own need foreseen?

So they rode on their way while Count Gregory led his men in the opposite direction toward the fief he had coveted, and whose title-deed he carried, all bloody in his arms, to burial.

Charles, the huntsman, standing at the door of his hut, watched the home-coming of the dead lord, and gave thanks to the devil for his vengeance, and cursed God that it had waited upon the road; while Ermengarde of

Ponthieu and Guy of Beaufoy left alone in the forest took each other into a swift, fierce embrace before mounting their horses and resuming the path they had elected to follow.

CHAPTER XII

TRAVELERS went slowly in medieval times even along the prescribed trade routes. The land was covered by dense forests, which only yielded to a few miles of country immediately around the towns or to the monastic dwellings and their surrounding acres of cultivation, which latter were wrested from nature by the energy of the monks.

Wind and weather, chance and circumstance, all had to be reckoned with and Bertrand held himself lucky in being a hundred miles from Paris at the end of a week. There were days when storms hindered his party, when the road became a quagmire, when brooks swollen by heavy rains had to be forded with the greatest caution. All this meant loss of time, and where men could have pressed on, women lacked the strength.

Danger was also a common factor in the journey. Europe was infested by mercenary soldiers who, disbanded after every cessation of hostilities and having no other means of subsistence, plundered and murdered wherever they went. Now Bertrand and his twenty men were not to be regarded as easy prey even to the most desperate of *routiers*,[1] yet hunger and greed urge to daring, and a band of these ruffians attacked the little party

[1] Disbanded mercenary soldiers who infested the country. One of Rome's grievances against Raymond VI. of Toulouse was that he took no measures against these depredators who swarmed over Provence.

as it lay one night in the open, scarce two days' march from Sens. It was the second time since leaving Paris that Bertrand had found no other roof than the sky to shelter him and his people. Monastery or castle did not always lie at hand, the sun would set over drear plains or behind gloomy forest, and darkness would find them exposed to every peril that lurked in the night, peril from wild beasts, animals, and men.

Then fires were kindled, a tent run up for the two women and Margot, such provisions as they carried—obtained from the last house visited—were cooked for supper, and watches set. The priests took their share valiantly, but of necessity the heaviest burden fell upon Bertrand, while only second to him in patience, courage, and endurance, came Bûchon, the one-time hewer of wood.

On this particular day they had been journeying from dawn to sunset drenched by rain, whipped by a cutting wind. Gray, lowering skies above, gray masses of mud beneath. The horses slipped continually. 'Father Pierre's mule stumbled once, and rolled his rider in the wet mud. The priest was not a patient man, but if he anathematized the animal, the wind drowned his curse. Bûchon took Margot up on to his saddle, and wrapped her close to him under his cloak. Enid and Lady Rosamunde fared no better than the men, but the former soon became too miserable even to grumble; while her mistress rode in brave silence, with ever a smile to answer such glances of whimsical appeal as Bertrand might turn in her direction. She was naturally valiant, but in any case would have held pride shamed to display a less cheerful front than he.

Brave she knew him, a great fighter she had seen him, fierce and brutal in anger, tender and chivalrous in

mirth, skilful in wordy warfare, a warrior and a poet. Now she saw him as the true leader of men, patient in difficulties, cheerful in adversity. She saw him riding with them, giving a word here, a laugh there, saw how they brightened under his influence, took fresh courage and patience from his store. He beguiled them with stories. She heard their shouts of laughter in a lull of the wind—and while marveling, perhaps, at such familiarity from a nobleman to his inferiors, was yet quick enough to see its value. The men finished the day, wet through indeed and grumbling, but the grumbling was cheerful, and if their bodies were spent their minds were fresh.

She herself felt too exhausted for speech when Bertrand lifted her from the saddle and placed her before such a sad fire as Bûchon had been able to kindle beneath the shelter of a rock. The camping place was not ideal, but night had fallen, and they had no alternative.

The horses were tethered and fed upon fodder soaked with rain. The men had to content themselves with cold wet bread and a draught of wine, but by some means Bûchon contrived hot broth for the two women and Margot. When Bertrand smelled the steaming soup, he clapped Bûchon on the shoulder.

"*Par die,* friend, you were worth fighting for," he cried.

"It will warm them," growled Bûchon, a person of few words, and went off with his pot of broth and that word "friend" ringing music in his tired heart. Every day that he spent in Bertrand's company tore a rent in the veil which had smothered the divine gift of his own manhood. And if speech failed him to express his gratitude, deeds remained. Bertrand understood how

much of a dawning soul went into the making of that bouillon.

Lady Rosamunde took it with a gentle word of thanks, Enid wept with delight, then with Margot both sought the shelter of their tent. It but served to keep the rain from falling on them. The ground on which they must rest was sodden with water. Such rugs and cloths as had escaped a wetting had been unpacked from the sumpter-mules and spread upon the muddy floor, but the lying would not be comfortable. Bertrand surveyed it ruefully.

"Heaven preserve your health, lady. You would have fared better by ship to Bordeaux."

"Every journey has its risks, and I prefer those by land," she answered cheerfully. "I would rather lie wet and quiet than dry and sea-tossed. Good-night, Count Bertrand."

The tent flap dropped between them. For a moment he remained, thoughtful.

"Every journey has its risks."

Then he shrugged his shoulders, and went off to see to the proper ordering of his camp.

The country here was broken into stony valleys lying between small groups of insignificant hills, with the river Yonne running not far away upon the right toward Sens. Bertrand had halted in a small, grass-carpeted, cup-shaped quarry now in disuse. The tent was pitched in front of a jutting mass of rock, behind which Bertrand tethered the horses. The path, some thirty feet long, leading into this quarry was strewn with large boulders and rough stones, and where it touched the road above, Bertrand had posted a sentry with his reliefs.

The position was not a choice, but a necessity forced upon Bertrand by the imperative need of some shelter

from the inclement night, and he did not know what was advancing upon him in the darkness.

That very day a band of thirty or forty *routiers* had ravaged the country round Sens, whereupon the citizens, hastily arming, had issued from the town, and slaughtering some, had driven the remainder into the wilderness, where they found themselves with no food save their blood lust, which, fomenting in empty stomachs, drives men to frenzy. To Sens they dared not return, having tasted the quality of its temper, therefore, they poured along the high road, praying such devils as they worshipped to send some richly laden merchants into their clutches, and so praying, came upon the gleam of Bertrand's camp fires. Now, he had posted his sentries well enough, but these villains were also soldiers, accustomed to skilled warfare, and in such broken country and in such a night of tempest, wind howling, gray sheets of rain deepening the darkness, it was not difficult to approach the position unseen and unheard. Easy, also, to mark the white blur of a tent behind the firelight, and to guess at a woman's presence. Not so easy, though, to guess the nature of the escort, but the *routiers* were greatly inclined to take a risk. Moreover, they had not discovered the horses behind the projecting rock.

The sentry on the top of the narrow path which led from the ground above into the hollow was faithful and alert, but the howling wind deafened his ears to the stealthy movements all round him, and the rain shrouded his eyes in mist.

It was that darkest hour of the night which precedes dawn. His was the last watch, and it lacked yet sixty minutes of completion. Bertrand had visited him barely a quarter of an hour since. He felt very lonely up there, and turned occasionally for a glimpse of the fire burning

below, and which winked up at him like some good comrade.

The wind still howled, but the rain stopped quite suddenly and, although where he stood, he seemed almost suffocated by the inky blackness, he could see, as it were at a great distance, a faint pallor breaking upon the gloom.

"Dawn," he muttered. "We're well quit of such a fiend-ridden night."

Something coiled round his neck, pressing the life out of him. He dropped his sword and, snatching the dagger from his breast, struck upwards under an armpit. The grip fell away, a weight sank sobbing to the ground, then he gave a yell to warn the camp and, picking up his sword, began hacking and thrusting at a confused mass of humanity, praying blasphemously the while for day.

It seemed an eternity, but was scarcely three minutes before men, roused from slumber by his shout, came stumbling up the path to help. The surprise had failed, and now the *routiers* must fight for their prey. It was no simple task in the darkness, and they hurt themselves considerably in many falls over unseen rocks which blocked their legs.

The tumult awaked Rosamunde and Enid in their tent. The latter uttered a screech, and caught frightened little Margot to her, but Rosamunde drew open the flap and gazed forth upon the scene. Black night had yielded to a gray, misty dawn in which men's figures loomed gigantic before her eyes. The hollow was alive with men—fighting, shouting, swearing. They rushed pell-mell down the path, leaped over the boulders, swarmed into the camp. Her breath came faster and her fingers clutched the dagger in her girdle, but she did not add a scream

to the roar of noise. A woman had good reason for fear in such a position. These *routiers* were devils incarnate. Not one story told of them did justice to their inhuman cruelty and brutality. The men who fell into their hands suffered a hell of torture. What women endured in no way bears recital.

Even as her eyes sought for Bertrand, he stood beside her, radiant and collected.

"By the beard of Mahomet, a pretty tussle," he said, and at his laugh her fears died utterly.

"The dogs fight well, too, but my southern wolves hold them. Now, do not move, on your life. You are safe for the few moments I want."

His confidence inspired hers. She nodded quietly and showed him the dagger. He started, then——

"You will not need it," he said. "I leave a watch-dog."

Bûchon, blood-stained and grimy, came to his call and stationed himself before the tent. Bertrand cast a glance over the fight. So far his men held their enemy off, but numbers must tell soon and time was short. He sprang forward again and spoke rapidly to five or six of his men. They immediately turned and ran, he running with them, and Gaston, aflame with mingled fear and excitement, at his heels. The *routiers* gave a shout, thinking to see them fly, but the remaining Provençals still offered hard nuts to crack. They had never seen Bertrand of Crein run from an enemy yet, and they in no wise believed he had done so now. On the contrary, they fought with perfect trust in his ability to pull them out of a tight place, and through faith performed marvels of valor. Bishop Foulquet smote with the best of them, using a sword which, disobedient to the edicts of heaven, proved in his hands a very potent weapon of defence on earth.

Pierre de Castelnau, mindful even in that moment of his soul's salvation, wielded a heavy wooden cudgel, an arm permitted to sons of the Church, wielded it, moreover, so grimly and so well that the *routiers* drew back from that fierce strange figure in its monk's robes, whose gleaming eyes flamed beneath a shorn skull, and whose lips worked convulsively in alternate prayer and curses as he crashed his cudgel upon the luckless pates nearest to him.

"Do you think to slay *me,* the appointed weapon of the Lord?" he thundered. "*Retrograde Satanas!* My work is still to do, and shall you come at the chosen of heaven!"

Cudgel and curse kept them at bay, and turning from him they met the fury of Brother Alfor, he fighting axe in hand like a man who in superhuman physical exertion strives to slake the thirst of some frightful passion. Three or four of the assailants had slipped behind the defenders, and went running towards the tent. Bûchon accounted for two, but a third shot out a filthy hand to seize Rosamunde. She shrieked and raised her dagger, but Alfor had seen the danger and, speeding up, clove the man to the ground at her feet. She never afterward forgot the monk as she saw him then. He had tossed off his black and white frock, and the black woollen jerkin and hose he wore beneath displayed a powerful frame. She saw the muscles straining on his thick neck and great arms. She saw his massive chest heaving in the deep regular breaths which told of mighty reserves of strength for his need. She saw his face and her heart grew sick and cold with fear. Here stood a man in a devil's guise, or a devil in a man's. Blood spattered him from head to foot. He loomed before her like some black and scarlet horror. Black his eyes, and scarlet the

frenzy, the blood lust, the triumph, and the gloating which scorched their pupils.

"Come with me," he said thickly. "I will carry you to safety."

His arms went round her. Gripped by that awful horror of him, she thrust him frantically away, but he had almost lifted her when a mighty shout rent the air, and the ground rocked to the thunder of horses' hoofs, as Bertrand and his men whirled down upon the enemy.

"Rose et ma mie!" cried Bertrand.

"Rose et ma mie!" echoed his men, and the cry rang again among the rocks. The horses swept on. Bertrand seeing his lady's plight, but not recognizing Alfor, charged upon them. The monk loosed his grasp and ran back into the battle followed by Bertrand, who, however, lost him in the mêlée. The *routiers* were helpless against mounted men. They turned tail incontinently, and such as could gain it, fled back up the path into the open, hotly pursued by Bertrand and his followers. Others were caught like rats in the trap of the rocks and cut down where they stood. Not one escaped. A *routier* could not expect quarter. Presently, when Bertrand came back, he saw the dead lying where they had fallen. Fifteen he counted, and as many more lay upon the open ground above. His own casualties were heavy enough for so small a party. The fight had been sharp but short, or the toll might have been heavier. As it was, two men were killed and four badly wounded. Burial and a prayer disposed of the former, but the latter presented difficulties. They could not ride, and he would not leave them to die. Neither could he afford to spare men to tend them since the escort was already dangerously weakened. He would have halted the whole party until they recovered but for the women, who could not be

expected to endure another night of exposure to the elements.

"Women are the devil for complicating things," he mused. "Angels, also," he added the next moment, as he saw Rosamunde on her knees beside one of the hurt men, deftly bandaging his wounds. Enid was busy with another, and Margot stood by her holding a bowl of water for her need. Others of the soldiers were resting after their efforts, while Bûchon bent over the fire, engrossed in cooking a breakfast. He seemed to have a genius for the commissariat.

To Bertrand in his perplexity came Bishop Foulquet, blood-stained and grimed, a very fine figure of the church-militant. The knight greeted him with a smile.

"I am almost minded to love a priest, Foulquet, for the sake of your sword-play—as pretty as any I have seen."

"Heaven will pardon my necessity," said Foulquet sourly. "But now, sir, what to do? The hurt men should be sheltered and the women, also. Sens lies two days distant, but I know the way to a monastery which will succor us. It lies scarcely ten miles from here, and has a convent adjoining, where Lady Rosamunde, and her woman and the child can rest."

"Good!" said Bertrand. "You and I and eight men will guard the women safely to your convent. Then you shall send your brethren of the monastery back under my escort, with salves for the wounded and litters to bear them. By heaven's name, we'll sleep dry and full this night."

"Do *you* supplicate heaven?" asked Foulquet, with a sneer.

"Ay, the heaven I understand, but, good bishop, I'll throw a sop to yours after this morning. I love a fighting man—friend or frock."

He flung a laugh over his shoulder at the angry churchman and strode off to order the move. When all had broken their fast the little party started. Pierre de Castelnau and Alfor the monk remained behind to shrive the dead. Bûchon was left in supreme charge of the camp. The slave of a week ago drew a deep breath as Bertrand rode away. He was no longer a "thing." He was a man to command men.

CHAPTER XIII

BERTRAND OF CREIN having little stomach for the company of churchmen, left his wounded at the monastery and pushed on to Sens, where the count of that place made him a welcome guest, and Lady Rosamunde found hospitality in the adjoining Convent of St. Ursula. Bishop Foulquet and Pierre of Castelnau lodged with the archbishop in his place beside the cathedral walls of St. Etienne.

Sens was proud of its cathedral which, completed thirty years previously, had taken forty-six years in the building, and occupied the site of an ancient temple on which legend said St. Savinian had built, at the close of the third century, a little church consecrated to the Virgin.

The archiepiscopal palace, the cathedral, the Cluniac monastery which served it, and the convent occupied a large portion of the ground between the outer walls of the town and the river. This formed the Clos (Enclosure) St. Etienne, being enclosed on three sides by formidable walls of defense, and having the river on the fourth. The monastery stood back from the water and was again surrounded by its own walls, but one wing of the convent rose upon the river's edge, and a portion of its garden ran out upon the bank.

From here, resting beneath the trees, Rosamunde could feast her eyes upon the beauty of the great church, and

flood her ears with the music of the bells in the campanile. These iron tongues of melody were famous throughout France and beyond. Each had its name. There are two which remain to our day, La Savinienne and La Potentienne. Seven hundred years ago, Rosamunde of Tracey sat in the convent garden, listening to their silvery whispers, thrilling strangely to the fuller sounds they pealed forth upon the scented evening air.

She had been the guest of the abbess for a week, and found great pleasure in the enforced rest from traveling. The weather was enchanting here in sunny Champagne, warm with dawning summer, fragrant with bursting buds, fresh with the delicate green of shrub and tree breaking upon the blue of a turquoise sky. The abbess proved charming—a handsome woman of the world, shrewd and witty, sister to the Count of Sens, with whom Bertrand lodged. The nuns went brightly about the convent, tending their fruit and flowers with cheerful faces —held it no sin to laugh, and seemingly found pleasure in heaven's service. They were for the most part daughters and sisters of the Burgundian nobility, and having by reason of their superfluous numbers and lack of dowries no place in the outside world, contrived a very merry world for themselves within the four walls of a convent.

Moreover, Rosamunde found great delight in putting off her travel-stained garments and attiring herself in the sweet, fresh linen and the delicate silken robes she loved. Such purchases she made in Sens, and added yet another laden mule to their band for the carrying of her frippery.

Bertrand came every day to visit her and bring the news of the town. Sometimes the abbess bore them company, more often they sat alone, their comradeship

growing with each visit. They spoke of England, and Richard, her troubadour king, who was a Frenchman born; of Rosamunde's convent life, and of her dead husband; of Provence, and of the husband she should wed, a courtly man and valiant, so she gathered from Bertrand, a great fighter and a noble gentleman, bearing one of the proudest names in all Languedoc. Then memory lingered upon their first strange meeting, recalled his answer to her need—here, though, it was she who spoke—touched frankly upon their first quarrel, with a laugh and perhaps the faintest pause; reviewed the horror of Ponthieu, and conjectured upon the future of the baroness and of Guy Beaufoy, her lover. And so to the fight with the *routiers,* and their present sojourn, with vague surmises as to what adventures lay before them. And he teased what he dubbed her northern prudery, and she reproved his southern looseness, at first in cold displeasure, until she learned to see the twinkle in his eyes, and refused to snap the bait of a purposed exaggeration.

So fled the happy, golden hours, drifting lazily, even as the river drifted idly at the foot of the convent garden. But the river flowed, if slowly, to an appointed end, and the golden hours fled swiftly, and they, too, sped to an appointed destiny—surely.

Lady Rosamunde sat in the garden on this sweet May afternoon, and Bertrand of Crein coming down the path from the convent, stopped to look upon her, himself unseen. She half sat, half lay, upon a low bank of emerald grass. A white robe clothed her, moulding every curve of her lissom form, and cut low enough to show the dimpled base of her delicious throat. A golden fillet bound her head, and from it the black hair trailed in two thick plaits upon the verdant ground. She leaned

on her elbow, her hand cupping her chin, and the glory of the sunshine framed her in quivering splendor. A great bank of hawthorn uprose in snowy loveliness behind her, the green grass was starred with pale daisies, then, lest the beauty of woman and of Nature should show too cold in their virgin white and translucent emerald, came the quick red of the May blossom peeping among the hawthorn, the vivid blaze of peonies among the daisies, and the crimson stain of Rosamunde's full lips upon the clear ivory of her face.

A poem of crimson and white and emerald beauty set in the heart of a sapphire sky.

The crimson battled with the cream of her cheeks as Bertrand broke upon her reverie. It seemed to him that the music of the bells sang in the liquid eyes she upturned to his as he stood cap in hand, waiting her permission to seat himself.

Provençal knights were notorious for their extravagance in dress, and Bertrand's taste went lavishly clothed. He had put aside his armor, and wore a yellow satin tunic with black indented border over leg bandages of fine black cloth and sandals of soft leather fretted with gold. A yellow velvet mantel edged with fur, and heavily worked in scarlet and gold, hung from his shoulders. His cap was yellow velvet, and a great red jewel held a scarlet plume in place. He carried no sword, but a dagger hung from a ring on his surcoat, just beneath the blazon of the three red roses.

And now he looked down at her, and she looked up, and each saw the other in a golden mist, and saw therein naught save their own eyes. And a little pause followed in which she did not speak, but stared at him in the shimmering veil, and he at her, until La Savinienne sang a message in the air above, and Rosamunde, with

a start and a little laugh, turned her eyes away, and bade him sit beside her.

He dropped three roses into her lap.

"They bloom sweetly in the count's garden. Will you wear them, Rose of the World?" Then as her white fingers played upon the red petals: "'Tis the reading of your name, Lady Rosamunde."

"I know. I have heard my mother say I came to her in the rose-time. I was her 'Rose of the World.' A mother's fond fancy."

"Will you excuse her? Indeed your christening was a prophecy."

How still the sunny afternoon! The bells had ceased. No sound reached them from the convent lying behind the green and golden wall of the laburnum trees. The hum of bees about the lilac and the lazy chirp of a cricket in the grass only made an accompaniment to the silence. Perhaps the river rippled a warning among the reeds. If so they did not hear it. They were alone in the heart of a world—a man and a woman, with three roses flaming upon his breast and three roses laid against her lips.

The silence deepened to breaking point. She felt his eyes upon her. He feasted upon her beauty. Her breast rose and fell. She was frightened, uneasy. What had happened to bring this joint into the armor of their friendship? She did not know. Who ever knows? Sunshine, flowers, music, spell of a languorous warmth! Which held the secret? If only he would turn his bright, hard eyes aside.

"Rose of the World!" he murmured, and touched her hand.

She looked at him then, and read his mind. Admiration she found, and the careless wish for amuse-

ment with a pretty woman. Nothing more. And he had thought to find a response in her to his mood of an hour, while she——

But here she shut the door upon a sudden fear, and with eyes as brightly steady as his own, flung jest for jest.

"*Gare aux épines,*" and lightly she drew a rose across the hand touching hers. Its trail showed in the scratch of a thorn.

Now Bertrand had spoken from varied motives. Partly because he knew himself moved by the spell of her beauty glinting in the yellow sunshine, partly from a desire for dalliance with a pretty woman, partly through a desire to tease. He had expected the sudden coldness in her eyes, the stiffening of her mouth, and an icy reproof. And lo, her eyes were warm, and her smile mischievous, and she gave him his change in his own frivolous coinage.

He was so amazed that he could only stare. As for Rosamunde, a fever ran in her veins. Had he not warned her against Guinevere, and here in sheer wantonness trod the first steps of Lancelot? A longing suddenly assailed her to teach this man a lesson, and make him repent a daring—which meant nothing. Oh, woman-soul, would anger have torn you so if it had been otherwise?

She leaned a little toward him. He saw the pulse throbbing in the soft whiteness of her throat.

"Rose of Gervaudan," she fluted. "Have you any as fair in Crein?"

He looked from the scratch on his hand to the wonder of her eyes.

"Rose of Gervaudan," he echoed. "None are so fair in Crein."

Still the madness held her.

"You carry me on your heart," and she laid a dainty finger upon the flower broidered on his yellow satin surcoat. He caught her hand, but she pulled it away.

"To the lord of Gervaudan," and laughed in his shining eyes. *"Fi donc,* Count Bertrand, put nonsense aside. You did not come here to talk *chansons* about a rose. Tell me rather, in seriousness, from whence Crein gets its device."

"The Roses of Crein!" said he slowly, then stopped, puzzled still by her mood, conscious of a growing desire to bring that softness again into her glance.

"Well, sir?"

The heavy lids veiled the secret of her eyes. Bertrand stretched himself at her feet, and watched her calm, pale face.

"Thus it happened. When Henry of England came storming Sieur Bertrand de Born, whom my father served, in his castle of Hautefort, my father fought at Sieur Bertrand's side. And so it happened that the English burst through the walls, and overrunning the courtyard, met Count Bertrand's men in a most fierce and glorious combat. Men saw red, my lady, blood in their hearts and in their eyes, blood on their hands. The very ground ran blood. Now, a captain of the English king saw Count Bertrand lying wounded beneath a white rose bush which flowered against the castle wall and, running up, thought to take him prisoner and so gain much honor. But my father, standing over his fallen master, received this captain upon the point of the sword. Right through the heart, lady, and as he fell, the blood spurted from the wound upon the roses and stained their whiteness red. Then Bertrand de

Born laughed, and raising himself to his knees, bade my father kneel also, and receive his knighthood.

"'Jehan of Born thou wert, Count of Crein art now. The fief is thine, and here thy device,' and he picked the bloody rose and thrust it upon my father, crying, 'The red rose of war. Did ever flower carry a sweeter scent? Blazon it crimson on thy shield, Jehan of Crein, and set its red seal upon men in battle.' That, lady, is the story of the first rose."

"The second, Count Bertrand, the second."

"The red rose of love. Men called my mother the Rose of Narbonne, and my father slew five knights who disputed her possession with him."

She sighed as though oppressed.

"Red rose of war, red rose of love. Blood on each. And now, sir, the third."

"Why, what else but the rose of the world."

"Rose of the world?"

"Ay, that rose of each man's world, fulfilled desire, and beneath it the motto, 'I hold my own.' A Crein for war, a Crein for love, a Crein for success, and a Crein to hold all three."

His deep voice lilted up a tone in triumph. His eyes shone into hers, and when he smiled his strong, white teeth gleamed between his full lips, as if hungry for all the man meant to have.

She had seen him in war. Would she ever see him in love? Perhaps, when she was Dame of Gervaudan.

The madness evaporated as swiftly as it rose. Once again she was Lady Rosamunde of Tracey, strong in virtue and in good faith, the affianced wife of Count Bertrand's friend, and herself the very good comrade of Count Bertrand.

"Heaven send you the bloom of all three," she said

gravely. "The abbess and her brother come this way. Shall we go to meet them?"

Her every movement was lithe, and she was on her feet before Bertrand could help her. So placid now her eyes, that as he followed her over the daisy-starred grass, he told himself that the coquetry of a minute past was but the dream of his imagination.

The abbess of St. Ursula and her brother Roger, Count of Sens, made a goodly pair as they came through the sunlight and shadow of the convent garden. He wore purple velvet and gold, she, the white robe of her order. Abbess by profession, *femme à plaire* by nature, or why did the soft lines of her dress suggest the draping of a beautiful statue rather than hide her form from carnal sight, and why did the coif frame her dark splendid face rather as a setting for the jewels of her eyes than to hide their light from the world she had renounced! A gemmed cross lay upon her breast and jewels flashed upon her shapely hands. She carried herself regally. There were some women who by their wealth, their power and personal magnetism made themselves very princesses of the Church, and of these Margaret, abbess of St. Ursula, was one of the greatest. The archbishop himself consulted her wisdom, and found it expedient to humor her caprice. Moreover, it was whispered that in her case as in many others, Rome was helpless to combat certain errors—a mild term—which should have had no place amongst a feminine community devoted to the service of heaven. With heresy and schism rampant in Christendom, Rome could not afford to unveil the irregularities of monastic life by the scandal of a public reform. And so far the populace was all in favor of the great monasteries and convents, for if they sinned amongst themselves, they were sanctuaries from baronial perse-

"She was on her feet before Bertrand could help her."

cution and perpetual fountains of charity in times of hunger. The people still remembered how St. Ursula had fed them in the terrible famine of ten years back. To them the abbess was a true saint of heaven, and Rome, content with an outward reputation which reflected credit upon Holy Church, maintained a discreet leniency toward the other component parts of her personality.

"Greetings, Count Bertrand," and her eyes rested kindly on his gallant figure. "My brother brings news for your ears."

"Our good cousin of Burgundy lies at Sens to-night," said the count. He was a fine man himself of thirty years. The abbess might have been a year younger.

"The duke!" said Bertrand.

"He honors my poor house, and will sup with the archbishop. Lady Rosamunde, will you bear my sister company, and bring beauty to grace our feast?"

Rosamunde looked at the abbess whose eyes shone very bright.

"It will be a diversion, child," she said. "Our cousin of Burgundy is a most charming gentleman."

The count glanced away, and spoke quickly to Bertrand.

"Do you then go into the world?" asked Rosamunde, puzzled.

The abbess laughed. Her even teeth flashed between her red lips. "I go where I please, and the duke is a blood relation."

A nun came speeding to them over the grass, slim and supple in her white robe with its touches of black. She stopped, panting from the haste she had made, and crossing her hands upon her breast, waited with downcast eyes.

"What now, Sister Yvonne?" demanded the abbess.

"Holy mother, it is the hour of evening dole. Sister Griselda sent me to say the poor wait at the gate."

"I will come."

As the abbess turned away, the nun looked up. Rosamunde caught the glance her eyes flashed at the two men and thought that she had never seen such a fire of life in any face before. It bubbled in her eyes and glowed in her cheeks, and when the abbess dismissed her, she ran because the spring of youth within her set her feet a-dancing.

The knights took leave of the ladies and rode back to the castle, which stood a mile away upon a hill overlooking the town. Count Roger went some time in silence, frowning as one in deep perplexity, then finally blurted out:

"You and I have been friends since we fought side by side in Palestine against the Saracens, is it not so, Bertrand?"

"I like to remember it, Roger."

"And your lord, Raymond of Toulouse, has shown me much kindness."

"What then?"

The lord of Sens gnawed his flowing mustache.

"You are my friend and Burgundy is my cousin. How shall I keep faith with both? Yet for friendship's sake I will give you this warning. Mark well the intercourse between Foulquet and the duke, and set your ears to the service of Toulouse. More I may not say, and for my honor's sake, I charge you, seek no aid from me to solve the riddle."

And Bertrand, on fire with curiosity, held his peace to serve the honor of Count Roger. Moreover, a hint to him was worth an hour's discourse to another, and

already his keen brain worked, in the past, in the present, to the future. Grim and silent rode the two men up the winding rock-bound path which led to the gray strength of Sens frowning above the river. Deep food for thought had both as they passed over the bridge into the courtyard. Swift to think, swift to act, such were the men of those Middle Ages. Great their need in the struggle for life, great their crimes, but undoubtedly great, also, their achievements.

CHAPTER XIV

THE moon floated in a sea of golden clouds. No pale silver goddess she, but full and ripe and warm in her yellow splendor. Kindly, too, or perhaps malicious, in her discreet hiding here and there behind soft velvet vapor. The château stood up boldly on its rocky pinnacle, and every tower and battlement was flung in clear, black outline against her brilliance. The town itself slept in the shadow of the castle. Not a light twinkled in its darkness. From the archbishop's palace alone came rays of brightness, testifying to the gaiety behind its walls. No such lights beamed from the convent. Here all was dark and silent as the grave. A curious stillness enwrapped the building—a stillness which suggested a deserted house. Yet the place was honeycombed with cells, each sheltering a living woman's presence, nun or novice, some sleeping, some praying. Curious indeed that sense of emptiness in the vast convent building.

Strange, also, that contrasting suggestion of *presence* in the quiet garden. Here, too, reigned stillness, but alive. A faint movement in the shadows, a light rustle among the bushes, a murmur behind the lilac! The night throbbed with subtle life. The splash of a pebble in the water, a tinkle as musical as a woman's laughter, a moonbeam dancing upon something as soft and small and white as a woman's hand!

Yellow Luna burst forth suddenly from behind a

cloudy screen. Her glory filled the garden. Did she smile then? Did Mother Nature's pulse throb faster as she spread her fever upon the earth?

Shadow again! Did Luna weep behind her curtains, or did she laugh, or did she neither, but simply understand?

What fay came dancing over the grass? The moon peeped out to see. A slim white figure, gold tresses streaming about bare white shoulders, naked arms waving above a little head, robe shortened above little feet twinkling in the mazes of a rapturous dance. Hither and thither like a storm-tossed leaf, up and down like a butterfly drinking to the full the cup of its short lived lift, darting as a bee darts from flower to flower, sucking the sweetness from each! A young bacchante intoxicated with the sensuous rapture of living! Thus she whirled on the moonlit lawn, then paused quite suddenly with her arms flung up and out in tense frenzied supplication, adoration, imperious demand for brimming measure of that joy of life which alone spelled life for her.

The moon laughed full into her face. Mother of Heaven! What witchcraft was it that lent this fay the burning eyes, the quick red mouth, and vivid face of Sister Yvonne? What devil dared take to himself the form of heaven's anointed bride? Luna shrank alarmed from such devilish sacrilege. When she looked forth again the evil spirit had vanished.

Now where might chaste Luna gaze without fear of illuminating sinful enchantment upon earth? Into the convent cloister surely, that sanctuary of holy women. Here, in the abode of pure hearts, here where the gray walls could only echo murmured prayer, she might loose her splendor. Purity ever welcomes light. Confident of her welcome, the golden goddess flooded herself upon

the smooth grass lawns and the carved richness of the cloister arches. No wanton fay sprang into sight, but a ring of women's white-robed figures kneeling in ecstatic prayer. The moonlight caressed them in quivering radiance. From her throne in heaven, Luna stooped to hear the pious supplication as their voices rose and fell in musical cadence.

"St. Julian!"

"St. Julian! St. Julian! sanctus dominé! amor omnia vincit improbus." [1]

"St. Julian, St. Julian, amor vincit omnia. Sanctus dominé, bless our love."

A merciful cloud took Luna into its soft embrace. Shadows filled the cloisters, and the nuns' voices lilted on through darkness. Presently they ceased, white figures gleamed here and there, vanished. The cloisters were empty.

* * * * * * *

The feast proceeded well enough in the archbishop's palace. It was served in a room apart from the great hall. A gem, this room, of medieval fancy. So pure, so true the lines of its delicate columns springing to the arched vault of the roof. So bold, yet so rare the pointed sweep of its windows filled with pale green glass after the invention of Suger, abbot of St. Denis in Paris. Rich the capitols of the pillars in the marvelous diversity of their ornament. True to the overflowing spirit of imagination which welled in those craftsmen of the Middle Ages, no two devices were alike. The eyes reveled in a wealth of fruit and flowers, bird and beast, all dissimilar, all fashioned into very poems of stone work.

[1] St. Julian was the patron saint of all lovers.

The bare spaces between each window were hung with richly woven draperies. Light rods ran from pillar to pillar, and from them hung curtains of silk and satin, golden tissues, and heavy brocade. Marvelously worked hangings from Syria and Persia draped the walls, for the archbishop wore the cross of the crusader, and had been in Palestine with Richard of England. True son of the Church, he had not hesitated to "spoil the Egyptians," and his supper party sat in surroundings of eastern splendor. Gold embroidery from Damascus adorned the table, the golden goblets were the ransom of a Saracen Emir, and the purple wine had been trodden from Syrian grapes beneath a Syrian sky.

The archbishop held it was no sin to enjoy an abundance of good food. The choicest wine, the finest dishes went to make the feast worthy of his highness the Duke of Burgundy. With such excellent fare, graced by two beautiful women, the supper should have gone merrily enough. Yet a subtle air of restraint weighed upon it. The guests were not tuned to a same note. What lay at the root of this impalpable discord? An ill assortment, perhaps. Two churchmen, a great prince, an abbess, a lady of high degree, and two knights of wit and valor. Now where the restraint?

Not in the duke, who showed himself most gracious and unbending, with special favor to the abbess, into whose ear he whispered ever and anon. Certainly not in the abbess, nor in voice, nor manner, nor attire, for the latter was so restricted in quantity as to be no restraint upon her person. She followed a growing custom among her sisterhood of wearing secular costume when beyond the convent precincts, and showed herself a passingly beautiful woman in her clinging scarlet draperies. Jest for jest she gave to handsome Burgundy,

smiles for his whispers, quick glance of sparkling eyes for his praise. No lack of gaiety here.

The archbishop plied a good knife, and seemed in jovial mood. He discoursed much with Bishop Foulquet, who also wore a look of grim satisfaction, unusual to his harsh features. Count Roger of Sens talked courteously with Lady Rosamunde, telling her such stories of her future home as he had gathered during a long sojourn in Toulouse. She listened with outward attention, but her eyes turned often to where Count Bertrand sat, forbidding and silent, scarcely touching one of the dishes that passed round the table. From him if from any one loomed the shadow upon their revelry. It was not easy to jest with a man whose face was set like a cold mask, scarcely easy for the archbishop and his highness to expend their courtesy upon a man who received all such overtures with an icy stare, and the curtest of responses.

Lady Rosamunde wondered what ailed him, but Count Roger did not look his way, and presently the host and Eudes of Burgundy, finding their efforts vain, left him to his mood, not without an exchange of uneasy glances. They would have been more disturbed could they have guessed at the blaze of fury consuming him, and which only an iron will enabled him to conceal. It takes no slight effort to keep one of such temperament calm when his blood lust is aroused, and his fingers itch to fasten round an enemy's throat and twist the life out of him.

And here lay the reason for his hot passion. After the duke had been welcomed at Sens, Count Roger guided Bertrand to a small room beside the ducal apartment, with an apology for having been obliged to change his bedchamber. Then he left him and presently Bertrand became conscious of voices speaking close at hand.

He looked about him, and discovered an opening in the stone wall which separated his room from that of the duke. He understood then that he occupied one of those rooms which were devised as safe places of oral espionage. Very few castles were without them in days when every man's hand was against his brother, and treachery was considered a legitimate move in the game of self-advancement, not to mention self-protection. This opening communicated with the other room, but was hidden by the rough stones in such a manner as to be unobserved by strangers, and the law of acoustics was so cleverly obeyed in its construction that every word spoken between the Duke of Burgundy and Bishop Foulquet came distinctly to Bertrand's ears. What he heard will be told in another place. Let it suffice now that he understood how Roger of Sens had paid his debt to friendship.

But for Lady Rosamunde's need of his escort, and the need of Raymond of Toulouse for the news he brought, Bertrand would have choked Bishop Foulquet to death there and then, and asked no better than to send the archbishop and Burgundy after him to hell.

Therefore he sat in iron restraint with never even a glance to spare for Lady Rosamunde in her deep purple robe of clinging sendal with the three roses splashing crimson against the curve of her white bosom. And Rosamunde, all woman, was piqued at his indifference, telling herself that courtesy alone demanded some deftly turned compliment from knight to lady—such for instance as he had taught her to expect from him at least.

The feast lagged for her despite Count Roger's attentions. She scarcely heard his praise of her charms, gave no heed to the stories that passed from lip to lip.

Quaint tales of saint and devil, witchcraft and miracle, with no lack of coarser fare to suit medieval palates. The archbishop listened indulgently to the worldly talk. He himself was pious and a zealous worker against the corruption in the Church, but Rome needed Burgundy's help, and it would have been impolitic to show disapproval of his morals. Worldly policy and purity in religion cannot walk hand in hand, and because Rome knew how far the influence of Margaret, abbess of St. Ursula, held the duke, the archbishop received her at his table and shut his eye when her cousin kissed her cheek.

And so the stories continued, with a last one reminiscent of William IX., Count of Poitou, famous warrior, lover, and troubadour.

When the laughter died away, the archbishop shook his head.

"I doubt not the count burns in hell-fire for his insult to the holy Bishop of Poitiers, whom he drove from the country."

"Il fut bon troubadour, bon chevalier d'armes," quoted the duke.

"Et courut longtemps le monde pour tromper les dames[1]*,"* completed Foulquet sourly. "There are many like him, south of Poitou."

The archbishop spoke hastily to Bertrand. While applauding the zeal of his brother in Christ, he deplored the fanatic hatred which disregarded prudence.

"You have sweet singers in Languedoc, Count Bertrand," said he with courtesy.

"Ay," returned Bertrand, his eyes glued on Foulquet. "The bishop himself was no poor troubadour once. Will

[1] "He was a good troubadour, a good knight-at-arms, and traversed the world to deceive the ladies."

you not bid him sing the lay which did *not* win the heart of Azalais de Roquemartine!"

Then as the blood surged to the bishop's face, he leaned across the board, laughing, and the others would rather have seen him frown.

"Twice traitor, Foulquet. Traitor to your art when you denied it for religion's sake, traitor to your wife, whom you denied for religion's sake. Does she fare well in her convent, holy bishop?"

The blood ebbed from Foulquet's countenance, leaving it in a sickly yellow distortion. Bertrand gripped the table edge with his iron hands.

"Twice ever calls to thrice. How will you complete the triple treachery, holy troubadour? Renegade to self, renegade to wife, now what remains but country! Oh, Foulquet of Marseilles, will you sell Provence?"

The bishop leaped in his chair, the duke started in his, and glared at Roger de Sens, but the count looked cleverly amazed, and the archbishop whispered hurriedly to the frenzied bishop. Bertrand burst out laughing. The veins in his forehead throbbed like quivering cords.

"He who grasps nettles must expect a sting," he cried, "and you, Foulquet are overfond of fouling the south, your own nest." He turned boisterously to the archbishop. His manner was one of deliberate insolence.

"Now courtesy bids me tread swiftly upon the heels of your entertainment," said he. "Will you hear the story of a certain priest who, returning home from a visit to his leman in the dusk, heard a sad voice proceeding from a ruined house. He drew near and inquired who cried thus in that place. 'Who art thou,' said the voice, 'that inquirest of me?' 'A priest,' answered he. 'What, a priest!' cried the voice in great astonishment, and repeating the word two or three times. When the priest

asked why he spoke in such tones of wonder, the voice answered, 'They come down so thick among us into hell that methought no priest could be left on earth; wherefore I cried aloud in wonder to hear that one was still alive; for I deemed they were all gone down to hell!' " [1]

The story was in bad taste, it was an insult to his host; moreover, Bertrand flung it from his lips like a challenge flung into an enemy's face. The archbishop grew crimson with anger, Foulquet livid. The duke clapped his hand to his dagger, but Bertrand faced them all with a sneer. Rosamunde marked how the pulse throbbed in the muscular throat beneath the gold ring encircling it.

"Was my poor story an offense, holy fathers? Now God be my witness that on the day which proves Rome's blessing to my country, I will do penance on my knees for the wrong my tongue has done you."

His eyes flamed from face to face, but not one could meet their steely blueness. The archbishop murmured in his goblet, the duke gulped his wine. Then the abbess rose, declaring it was full time to depart, and Burgundy, plainly relieved, declared his will to see her in safety to the convent. All bade their host farewell, Bertrand with the mocking smile still twisting his face into ugliness. Along the noble corridors of the palace, down the great staircase and through the tall, carved doorway they went, and so gained the gardens which ran up to the convent wall. A small postern set in the wall opened to Lady Margaret's key, and she and the duke passed through. Count Roger halted. Both Rosamunde and Bertrand marked the frozen stillness of his face quite plainly in the moonlight.

"Accompany Lady Rosamunde, Bertrand," he said.

[1] See "A Medieval Garner," by Coulton.

"I will see to the horses at the main gate." He bowed low to Rosamunde, and left them. They entered the mazes of the convent garden, wherein the duke and the abbess had vanished from sight, and in which they, also, lost no time in losing their way.

CHAPTER XV

THE path turned hither and thither between dark bushes, wound towards the river, twisted suddenly, and brought them to a veritable maze of dim openings, from which neither could select the right road. They stopped, completely baffled.

"Ariadne's thread could not deliver a man from such a labyrinth," said Bertrand impatiently. The ugly mood still held him; moreover, he greatly desired solitude wherein to turn over in his mind all that he had learned. This dalliance fretted him into a discourtesy towards a lady that he would shortly repent.

"A murrain on that flighty abbess, to leave me in this plight," he grumbled. "Yet you should know the way, Lady Rosamunde."

"I do not," she said in a voice which might have warned him.

"And you have walked in the garden day after day! Folly of fools; do women never use their eyes for aught save the last fashion in a wimple or the crisping of a ribbon?"

"They use them in vain to find a gentleman for their need," she retorted, on fire with indignation. "God send you better manners, Count Bertrand, and me a safe conduct to the convent. I'll be your trouble no more this night." And with that she turned, and, speeding blindly along the first path that offered, disappeared among the bushes.

Bertrand was so taken aback that for a moment he stood quite still, then swearing softly against himself, ran in pursuit.

But Rosamunde had completely vanished into the maze of the garden. He hunted fruitlessly, calling her name. The darkness flung it back upon him, the bushes caught its fragrance and hung it upon their bosom, but of sight or sound of the lady herself came no sign.

"Now if an Eleanour of Aquitaine were in Rosamunde's bower this night!" reflected Bertrand uneasily, and a new-born fear for her safety drove all other thoughts away. He plunged again into the thickets, another Lysander seeking his Helena! Surely Puck had dusted his eyes! What else brought him back to the postern door through which they had passed half-an-hour since?

He swore fluently in Provençal and Arabic, then, emerging from the mists of wrath, took counsel of cool reflection. Which led him into abandoning a return to the bewildering garden, and to forcing a way along the foot of the wall which must, he argued, lead him to a definite conclusion.

Meanwhile, Lady Rosamunde had fled, a prey to quivering resentment. Her woman's vanity was already piqued by his indifference at the supper table. Wounded in her conceit, she chose to widen the hurt by resentment of his insult to Holy Church. That he had failed to perceive her displeasure rankled sorely, while his obvious haste to be rid of her presence and that contemptuous reference to feminine foolishness brimmed the cup of anger to overflowing.

"I would rather lie all night on the ground than be beholden to him for guidance to the convent," she resolved as she ran panting, and not knowing in the least whither she went. Hither and thither she scurried, and,

after the manner of reckless women, taking no heed to her course. Presently, lack of breath stopped her flight. She halted, one hand clutching her gown above her little gold-shod feet, the other laid upon her heaving breast. So she stood like some fair wood nymph, turning her white neck this way and that, straining her eyes into the shadows to find a trace of guidance.

The moon sank slowly into the arms of Morpheus. Then with a triumphant glitter the stars sprang forth to revel in what hours were left them by their brilliant queen. A silver light flooded the darkness. Rosamunde shone in its radiance. How still the air! How soft the shadows! On such a night elves and fays were known to dance in magic rings about the grass. Hapless the mortal who perceived them. Enchantment must ensue—devilish possession! The lady shivered and crossed herself.

How sweet the breeze, how gentle the music of rustling leaves! On such a night a thousand unseen Cupids might quiver in rosy loveliness upon the scented air. On such a night a man might tell his love, a woman listen, lips melt into lips, sighs die in a kiss. On such a night might love reveal the world to such a pair.

A man's face dawned upon her sight, blue eyes, white teeth, full passionate mouth! She covered her own eyes, and leaned trembling against a tree. In very sooth the garden was bewitched to bring her such a vision! She looked up again, and cried aloud. A white robed spirit stood before her with golden hair lying disordered on bare white shoulders and great eyes burning in the face of Yvonne the nun.

Lady Rosamunde was brave enough, but witchcraft and sorcery held the world in firm thrall, and for a moment she believed herself in the presence of a fiend.

Yet when she made the sign of the Cross the spirit laughed.

"Fear not, lady, I am flesh and blood," she said in a sweet voice.

Rosamunde eyed askance the scantiness of her silken robe.

"Surely you are Sister Yvonne, whom I saw this morning," she ventured.

"Nun by day, woman by night." She flung her arms out wide, and laughed again, long and low and very warmly. "Oh, god of life, how I do thank thee for such soft, sweet nights!"

"Holy Mary!" gasped Rosamunde, "who are you that talk so wildly?"

The white figure danced rather than walked close to her. Every star in heaven seemed to dispute the privilege of shining upon her beauty. She was like a shimmering spirit of silver radiance as she poised upon the grass against the dark background of the shrubs.

"Men call me 'Yvonne of the Beating Heart,'" and she caught Rosamunde's hand and held it beneath her breast. Under that hand fluttered something so wildly that Rosamunde thought instinctively of a bird beating its wings against its prison bars.

She drew away. "Men!" she whispered, "men! and you a holy nun!"

Yvonne nodded. Her great eyes glowed like lamps in her small face.

"They robbed me—a child then—of freedom, and brought me here. They caged a lark and bade it sing the glory of God. Fools! fools! They built walls round a woman's heart and bade her crucify the womanhood that God had given her. Fools, fools, fools!"

She ended on a note of pain. Lady Rosamunde put

her hands to her ears, then dropped them again, horrified yet fascinated by this wickedness which had found her in the garden of the brides of heaven.

The nun swayed from side to side as if treading a measure.

"Will you be shocked, lady? Rather be merciful. You are free, and I am bound, yet are you more fair than I? You may love, I must renounce—yet have you more splendid kissing lips than I? You may sing and dance, I—if I dance I am accursed, and no music may pass my lips save hymn and chant. Yet is your voice sweeter than mine? Listen! 'Tis a song of Count Walter's:[1]

"To our field-meeting
Stole I at even,
There was my true love come before!
So sweet was his greeting
(Lady of Heaven)
That I am blessed for evermore.
Kissed he me? Yea, a thousandfold!
See, my red lips are not yet cold."

She sang very softly, but the notes pearled out upon the night in a flood of richest melody. Rosamunde could speak no word. She told herself all this was but a dream.

"No shame to you to wear bright satin, rich furs, and jeweled gauds, no shame to you to bare your bosom and your arms," went on the flute-like voice. "Is your throat whiter, your bosom softer than mine?" and she tossed back her streaming hair and curved her arms to show

[1] Walter v. der Vogelweide, a Tyrolese nobleman who fell out of favor at the Viennese court and took to the profession of a wandering minstrel. He was probably the first man of noble birth to do so, and was one of the greatest lyric poets of the Middle Ages. See "A Medieval Garner," Coulton.

their dimpled beauty. "A woman even as you are a woman, but bound, while you are free. Then be merciful."

The words fell strangely upon Rosamunde's ears. Free! She was free! To roam the world, to dance, to sing, to love! Free! She who was bound in honor to a strange man old enough to be her father!

She uttered a little gasping sob. The nun looked at her curiously.

"Do you weep? You should be happy. But why do you walk alone? Where is the gallant I saw with you upon the lawn this morning? The properest man ever my eyes rested upon. Oh, lady, you are happy in such a lover."

Rosamunde started as though the words had actually stung her, while a crimson tide flushed breast and throat and face, and even the crumpled rose leaves of her ears.

"He is no lover of mine," she said in a shaking voice.

Yvonne smiled in a weird, mysterious fashion.

"He is your lover, and you are his. *I* know if *you* have not yet learned. Am I not Yvonne of the Beating Heart?" She put her hand upon her breast. "It teaches me to read the secrets of a man's face and of a woman's."

Ever that haunting smile upon her mouth! Rosamunde held her breath, staring at her like a soul bewitched.

Bertrand her lover! How sweet the words! How warm and dark the night! The wind ruffled the hair on her temples as softly as a man's lips might have brushed them. Her breath came quicker through her half opened mouth. She laid her hands upon her breast, and stared at Yvonne, who stared at her and smiled—and smiled.

A witch of the woods in her filmy robe, her bright hair

crowned by starlight. A witch of the woods spelling forth enchantment between her rosy lips—a witch——

A witch! Rosamunde came out of her dream with so sudden and violent a reaction that she fell trembling against the support of a tree-trunk behind her. A witch, of course, and she the victim of her devilish sorcery. No flesh and blood woman this, but a demon who had taken the form of Yvonne the nun to lure her soul to its destruction.

Sick at heart, spent with the revulsion of her feelings, and terrified beyond measure, she made the sign of the Cross.

"No holy nun are you, but fiend, indeed, who would defile me with such wanton talk. *Ne perdas cum impiis Deus animam meam*——"

The feeble words died away before Yvonne's pitying shake of the head. Surely this was a very gentle fiend.

"Save the Latin for your greater need. You carry it within you or your eyes belie you," and she looked long and long into the troubled eyes of Lady Rosamunde of Tracey.

And the pity in the nun's gaze frightened the proud lady, she knew not why, unless maybe she read a prophecy therein.

"Heaven save us," she whispered at last. "Are you indeed a nun?"

Her repugnance did not offend Yvonne. She laughed merrily.

"I am what men made me. Will you come and see what God made me, and how, by skillful weaving of the two, I live, when by the first alone I must violate my life and die."

But Rosamunde drew back.

"I seek a way to the convent. Mary, pity me, I

thought to rest in holiness. By Christ's holy name, I'll not go with such as you."

"Will you not learn how sister-women live, and profit by the lesson?" said Yvonne and suddenly put forth her hand and clasped Rosamunde round the wrist.

"I will be your guide. Come!"

What magnetism thrilled from those small, strong fingers to melt all opposition and send the lady meekly at her heels? Rosamunde did not know, had no time to guess, but most undeniably found herself drawn swiftly along the paths of enchantment.

The maze of the garden did not exist for the nun. She sped surely through the trees and bushes, and it was not long before they came out onto the open lawn before the cloisters. Instead of entering the convent, however, Yvonne went in the opposite direction, towards the little chapel. She pushed the unfastened door open, and whispered to Rosamunde to look.

Lights burned dimly on the altar, and their glow fell upon the upturned faces of two or three nuns who knelt upon the steps. With hands crossed upon their breasts the nuns prayed unceasingly. Their faces were the purest that Rosamunde had ever seen. Their eyes shone with heavenly radiance, and true holiness had placed its ineffable seal upon their brows.

"Sanctified to heaven if ever women were," murmured Yvonne. "You shall sleep better for the sight. Now see another picture."

She led Rosamunde from the chapel back into the cloisters, and, passing through the dim arched ways, came to a low door set in the thickness of the walls. It yielded to her touch, and the two went through into a dark, cold passage. When Yvonne had shut the door behind them, Rosamunde hung back before the gloom.

The nun, however, drew her forward resolutely. She, at least, was sure of the way.

"There are steps here," she said, and Rosamunde, descending, counted twenty before they stopped again. Another door apparently, since she heard three peculiar raps as of a hand upon wood, and in another moment a faint glimmer showed where the door had been opened. A voice whispered something unintelligible, but she caught the nun's reply, "Amor," and guessed it for a password. The door swung back to admit them into a low, bare vault lit by a lantern. From a second door beyond came the sound of many voices and much laughter. Rosamunde's heart went a trifle faster. She was not afraid, but uneasy lest this mad nun had brought her dignity to an unseemly risk.

"Where have you led me?" she asked imperiously. "What lies beyond?"

"Pleasure in the crypt of St. Etienne," laughed Yvonne, her eyes all afire, and before Rosamunde could protest, she had flung wide the door and dragged her into as wild and bacchanalian a revel as ever proved the folly of the monastic system for a method of gaining salvation.

A long, low vaulted crypt, its stone walls hung with curtains. A table bearing the remains of a feast, disordered goblets, stains of spilled wine, roses tossed here and there among the dishes! And round the board, men and women, some overcome with wine, some hilarious, others silent, exchanging long, deep glances. The men were clad in secular silk and velvet, or in the monk's robe of the Cluniac order. The women were garbed in every extravagance of rich attire. White bosoms freely exposed, dimpled arms bare to the shoulder, flowers and jewels twined in tangled hair, while even more scandal-

ous than this frank abandon were those who still wore the white and black robe of the holy sisterhood, with disordered wimple pulled aside from fair faces now flushed by wine, and bright eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Amor!" A proper key to unlock the door upon such a scene! No shame here for lips to meet lips, for strong arms to wind about a yielding figure! None to reprove the burning whispers, the provoking smiles. A man stood on the table singing to the accompaniment of his lute—a wild, sweet, wicked song, which sent the blood flaming to Rosamunde's cheeks as she looked about her in bewildered dismay.

Oh, the faces of those other women who listened to this song of the joys they had renounced! She covered her own eyes to shut out the sight, and stood unnoticed by the door. Not so Yvonne of the Beating Heart! She ran forward, and sprang lightly onto the table beside the singer. One small foot overturned a goblet of wine, which poured a red stream about its whiteness.

"The wine of our youth and life," she cried. "Now play me a measure, good troubadour, and I will dance in this river of red delight."

The player fingered his lute in some strange melody he had learned among the Saracens. All the color and light, the barbarism and fierce passions of the East were in this music, and lived for the spectators in the wonderful dancing of that lissom figure upon the table, with her little feet splashing the red wine upon the whiteness of her silken robe.

Men and women hung breathlessly upon her movements. One could hear the vague murmurs, the swift intake of a man's breath, even Rosamunde watched, spellbound by the fascination of the scene.

How she danced! Now slow, now quick, with such a rounding of snowy arms, such an opening and shutting of slim, taper fingers; with eyes now veiled in languor, now flashing fire, with mouth now curved in softest sadness, now parted like a crimson flower to show the pearly gems of her teeth. And now she drooped, and now she laughed, now wept, now sang. And danced and danced. A houri dancing the souls of men and women into paradise, Yvonne of the Beating Heart—Yvonne the nun!

She stooped, caught up a handful of crimson roses from a bowl, and, lifting herself again, tossed the petals into the air, then stood still poised, with arms outstretched, and received the rosy shower upon her white loveliness.

Wild shouts of acclamation filled the vault. A man who had been sitting with his back to the door leaped to his feet, goblet in hand.

"*Un jour de bonne aventure vaut bien cent,*" he blasphemed. "Here's to Eros and Yvonne! St. Julian guard her well." He drained his wine, and as the others, shouting and applauding, drank to Yvonne, he swung round and saw Rosamunde standing by the door. At the same moment she recognized him, and realized to the full her equivocal position. For here stood Alfor the monk, and what he thought of her presence in such company, she read in his eyes as he lurched toward her. Sick at heart, she turned and fled into the small room behind, but he caught her before she had gone three steps.

"*Amor omnia vincit improbus,*" he said thickly. "Has it brought the great lady to me at last!"

She twisted in his grasp, too proud to cry out, and her hands groped for the dagger in her girdle. Not fear, but the sickening outrage to her pride, swirled a red mist

before her eyes. She struck at him fiercely, and heard his exclamation, then came the sound of men's voices, a rush of steps upon the stone staircase outside, and the vision of Bertrand upon the threshold of the opened door.

She saw his face as his eyes fell upon her, saw him stride forward. Then she was free of Alfor, and captive to Bertrand, and the room was filled with strange men, amongst whom, however, she recognized the Archbishop of Sens and Bishop Foulquet. The cries of women mingled with the deeper shouts of men. All was noise and confusion, but Bertrand had her by the arm, and half led, half carried her up the stairs.

They gained the cloisters, crossed the grass, and came to the convent door before he spoke; yet she trembled so that when he would have loosed her he could not or she must have fallen.

"How came you supping at such a stew with that damned priest?" asked he, cold and very fierce.

She knew his anger, understood his suspicion, hated him for both and herself more for the weakness which kept her dependent upon his arm.

"Folly of fools!" she panted with the tears smarting under her lids. "I ran into it unawares when I took the burden of my company from you."

She laid her two hands upon his breast and leaned away from him, with her head thrown back and the purity of her full throat and chin left free to his eyes. So he held her in the shadow of the gray convent walls on this sweet summer night beneath the shimmering heavens.

The angry contempt died from his face. Remorse darkened his eyes.

"Did I thrust you into danger? Your dagger is red

with blood! Oh, thrice brute and unmannerly cur am I!"

"Did I kill him?" She shook in fury and did not see his smile.

"A scratch on his cheek. He had more from me." Then very humbly he said, "Will you forgive me, lady?"

"For the lack of courtesy, yes. For the—for what you thought of me a moment since, never."

He felt her trembling in his arms, and saw the tears roll down her cheeks. Folly of fools, how fair a woman for a man's arm to hold!

She perceived the madness in his eyes and laughed wildly through her tears.

"Alfor the monk! Bertrand the knight! Now heaven send an honest man for my protection!"

"And blind his eyes to save his honor," he retorted fiercely, yet nevertheless loosed her then, and thundered at the convent door. A lay sister came trembling to that furious summons, and, opening, found a man and woman with white faces all worn by the passions of the world.

"Jesu Maria shield us!" she quavered. "What seek ye here?"

"'Tis the Lady Rosamunde of Tracey," snorted Bertrand. "See her safely to rest."

And with that and no more, he turned and fled into the darkness like a man running from fear.

CHAPTER XVI

IT had been in groping his way round the garden wall that he came upon a door opening to the archbishop and Foulquet with several of the minor brethren, all wearing discomposed countenances. If ever men looked oppressed by distasteful duty, they looked it. Before them, however, went one whom none might gainsay—a tall, thin, monkish figure, his face shrouded by the cowl of his robe. Dominic of Calahorra on his way from Flanders to Citeaux had sought a night's hospitality from the archbishop a few minutes after the dispersal of the supper party, and he was present when two nuns from St. Ursula brought to his grace an awful tale of the abominations at that very moment taking place in the crypt of St. Etienne. No matter what prompted the tale bearers, jealousy, vengeance, or religious zeal, the horrible fact had to be dealt with. The archbishop groaned inwardly, and wished his distinguished visitor anywhere but in Sens that night. For this Spanish priest upon whom the Pope leaned as upon a tower of strength was not the man to let such sin go unreproved, and already his authority was sufficiently powerful to bend the greatest prelates to his will. He went forth now in his fanatic zeal to root up the canker of St. Etienne, followed by the archbishop and Foulquet, the former quaking and ardently praying that Burgundy had ridden soberly back to Sens. Bertrand's appearance

added to his discomfort. He had no stomach for such a witness to the discredit of Holy Church, neither had the bishop, who cursed beneath his breath. But Bertrand demanding a guide through the intricacies of the garden, they had no choice but to suffer his company, and when they descended to the crypt curiosity took him with them. To what end has been already told.

* * * * * * *

In the early hours of the new morning Bishop Foulquet and Brother Alfor held converse in the latter's cell. The bishop poured forth reproaches, talked of thwarted schemes, hinted strongly of punishment to come.

"Will you betray the Church to her enemies?" he stormed. "Will you put fresh weapons into heretic hands against us? Go to, man, we chose you as a sword of strength, and behold yet another Samson shorn by the eternal Delilah!"

Black and lowering stood Alfor, speaking no word. Foulquet paced the room, stopped before him, and flamed again.

"You should have journeyed to Béziers with them. Yours the task to win her confidence, to train her mind. You should have brought her to confession, through her you should have learned her husband's secrets, and those of his master, Raymond of Toulouse. Now all is lost. They will not suffer your company. Heaven do so and more, also, to you, Alfor the weakling, for the harm you have wrought to Rome this night."

Thus he cursed with upraised hand, then burst into strident laughter.

"The cause of heaven lost for a woman's face! Your immortal soul damned for a woman's lips! Fool! Fool! I say!"

Then Alfor lifted his eyes and spoke.

"Did you not draw near to death for love of Azalais of Roquemartine? So do I burn for Rosamunde of Tracey. Ay, cry out upon me, holy father, but you kissed where you would before you came to the Church, while I who am young am caught, and shut in a hell of desire for all the Church forbids a man."

In hell indeed if one might judge by his eyes. Laugh for laugh he gave Foulquet, and, though the bishop frowned, he could find no words to stay him.

"Fool am I! Thrice blessed fool this night, who held her in my arms. To the devil with you, Foulquet the troubadour. Easy for you to blame who have eaten the honey and want no more. But look back, man. Think on Azalais, and talk me no damned talk of lost souls. My soul might rot to all eternity if Rosamunde would look kindly on me in the flesh."

Again he laughed, and his fierce, black face was all twisted with a sneer.

"May I not look upon a woman? I can pay my quart of wine with the best of them."

The abuse was too well known for Foulquet to attempt to rebuke. Indeed, the fire consuming Alfor scorched him into impotent silence.

Suddenly the monk put his hands to his breast and tore at it like one striving to wrench an agonizing cancer from his body.

"I am in hell," he said thickly, "in hell."

Then Foulquet with an effort caught at his shaken authority, and essayed admonition.

"Whence you can escape by prayer and fasting only. On your knees, miserable sinner, and supplicate mercy of heaven."

Alfor glared at him with tortured eyes.

"She was mine to-night—and I lost her. That is my hell, you fool!"

The blood rushed to the bishop's face.

"*Par le sang Dieu,*" he swore, and felt for his dagger. Then his hand dropped. Alfor was mad for the time. So much any man might see, and with the name of Azalais ringing in his ears, Foulquet was led to an understanding of his frenzy, and, therefore, to unwonted forbearance.

Silently he turned on his heel and went to his own room, where he stayed open-eyed in deepest thought until La Savinienne summoned the brethren to matins. Then he arose, much burdened in mind by the past and anxious for the future.

Alfor was too useful to lose. He took counsel with the archbishop, and after an earnest conference Alfor was called before them. He came, defiant, black, lowering, an awkward tool in less skillful hands than those trained by Rome's master craftsmen.

Etienne of Sens, however, had long since justified his reputation for delicate manipulation of dangerous weapons. Thus he handled Alfor the monk, who was proving himself most indisputably Alfor the man. Not a reproach, not an allusion to the occurrence of last night passed his lips. In dry, detached accents he simply gave the monk his orders. He would remain in Sens until the following week, when a band of pilgrims bound for the shrine of St. Monica in Avignon would arrive there. He would continue his journey safely in their company to Béziers. There he would await further orders. So much for the monk, now came the sop to the man. He might be required to make himself well acquainted with the household of Hubert, Count of Gervaudan.

The archbishop looked carelessly out of the window across the sparkling river. Foulquet was gazing at an illuminated missal lying on the table before him. The cowl hid Alfor's face. Not a glance passed between the three, but when Alfor bowed and silently withdrew, Etienne heaved a sigh of relief and Foulquet's brow was clear.

"A straight road with a man. Now for the women. St. Anthony send us a safe deliverance from their stings."

Foulquet nodded. "Very awkward, my lord. Will the abbess fight?"

"Will she fight!" echoed the other in derision. "Ay, she'll fight for the love of it, and hark ye, brother, she can carry Burgundy with her. Deuce take the chance that brought Dominic here at such a time!"

"Can you not reason with him?"

"When I ventured, he commanded that I cease unholy traffic with the devil. To me, Etienne of Sens, monk of Cîteaux! *Par la dent Dieu,* can a man serve two masters? Rome wants Burgundy. Margaret of St. Ursula holds him in the crease of her hand, and Rome bids me affront such a woman!"

Words could not express his disgust. Here was new trouble indeed.

"What can she do?" asked Foulquet.

"Come and see. And the people of Sens worship her. Heaven knows how they may take the matter. My archbishopric to a mud pie that we have an uproar in Sens to-day."

His fear had a solid foundation. With Dominic and Foulquet and Pierre of Castelnau, followed by his train of clergy and lay brethren, he set forth to the chapel of the Ursuline convent. The provost of Sens and the

senior burghers of the town accompanied them, every man of the company ill at ease. And, truly, dread went before fact, for when they entered a fearsome sight greeted them.

Upon the rough, unpaved flooring of the chapel before the altar lay an enormous cross. But what a cross! Strange beyond belief, incredible to any who had not gazed upon it. A mosaic in black and white, catching the dim light in curious reflections, as from many flashing eyes! Curious also to mark at regular intervals those round, white patches splashed with crimson, so like human faces with their parted lips, curious, also, that suggestion of rhythmic movement, as of deep breaths rippling over the length and across the trees of the prostrate cross. A trick, surely, played upon the eyes by the sudden transition from the sunshine without to the semi-gloom within!

By all the saints of heaven this was no trick! The mosaic was alive indeed, its stones were breathing palpitating nuns in the black and white robes of St. Ursula lying head to foot, each with her arms outstretched in the form of a cross. Thus the large cross was composed by the many smaller ones, and in the center, where the arms of the tree met, stood the abbess. Her superb figure was drawn to its greatest height, her eyes burnt black in her white face beneath the snowy wimple, and her arms raised above her head bore a crucifix—reversed.

The archbishop stopped dead at the sight. Foulquet crossed himself, and Father Pierre muttered a prayer. The satellites in their train uttered a howl of fear, while the provost and his burghers fell upon their knees. Only Brother Dominic preserved a measure of composure, and even he looked uneasy. Nevertheless he made his effort.

"My lady abbess and sisters all," he began——

The organ boomed forth and drowned his voice, and up from the living cross outstretched upon the ground rose the dread maledictory chanting of the *Media Vita.*

"Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery; he cometh up and is cut down like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.

"In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek for succor——"

The voices rose and fell in weird cadence. No sweetness in them. Harsh and shrill they volumed forth the curse which should invoke an evil death upon these men who had dared intrude upon St. Ursula's sanctuary. The abbess led the horrible singing. One hand still uplifted the dishonored crucifix, the other was flung out, with finger pointing now at this man, now at that, covering each with the denunciations chanted by the prostrate nuns.

The world was dark in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Men groped blindly in the mists of ignorance, of superstition, and of an awful belief in the powers of witchcraft. The curse of the Church fell upon them like a blight. The very clergy themselves were not free from dread of the maledictions they used so liberally against others when these were turned against themselves. As the abbess and the nuns sang on, their voices rising to discordant screeches in the invocation of evil, dread fastened upon the men who listened. The provost leaped to his feet, and began fighting a way to the door. The burghers followed him, mad now with terror, striking out blindly at all who hindered their escape from those awful voices.

Such panic is contagious. The brethren of St. Etienne broke badly and fled with their secular companions. For

the moment a seething, fighting crowd of frightened men filled the doorway of the chapel, then it escaped in the space of the cloisters, and the road was clear for the archbishop and his fellows.

Pale and shaken they, too, retreated. Foulquet closed the door to shut out the sound of that chant, and they went back in silence to the palace whence they had set forth to chastise a woman.

* * * * * * *

Night fell. The sky was overcast, the promise of rain moaned amongst the trees of the convent garden. The mass of St. Etienne rose like a blur upon the darkness. Within the vast cathedral all was shrouded in gloom save where a taper burning upon the high altar shone like a tiny eye in the bosom of this soft dark vapor. Its beam fell upon the white face of Dominic of Calahorra, tortured in a very agony of prayer for the sins of the world he had set forth to save.

CHAPTER XVII

THE man and the hour! What troubled time had brought forth Dominic of Calahorra to make his indelible mark on the world? The failing of the old order, the birth of the new. At a time when the Papacy by a series of triumphs over the great temporal rulers of Christendom had apparently established her power most firmly, the flaws of weakness were already cracking the huge edifice to her fall. The very wantonness of her despotism was driving Christianity to insurrection. The long struggles against the imperial power, even though triumphant, left a deadly trail of rankling unextinguished animosity. The interdicts levelled upon entire nations, making a whole people suffer for one man's sin, in the very nature of things awakened doubts, in many cases deadened religious fears, in as many others maddened people to religious desperation.

All these conspiring causes account for the popularity of the movement in the middle classes in which it chiefly spread. For these lower orders of the cities were striving after civil liberties, forming municipalities and opposing not only the authority of the nobles, but that of bishops and chapters.

Were there no honest Churchmen to stem the tide by their example of lofty and pure living? Many! They uplifted their voices in exhortation, in reproof,

in stern denunciation. And the result of their efforts was but to increase the revolt.

For how should the flagrant, acknowledged venality of Rome be denounced without denouncing Rome herself? And how should the avarice of legates and cardinals pass into a proverb without involving the whole Church in the same offense? When Thomas à Becket, primate of England, had declared that the court and council of the Pope was for any man's purchase, when Henry II., King of England, boasted openly that he could buy the Papacy itself if vacant, how should the minds of simple men not revolt from that which earned their betters' jibes?

"If heresy was the cause of degradation to the Church, the self-degradation of the Church had given its strength to heresy." [1]

Thus arose a great anti-sacerdotal movement. Men rebelled against the yoke of the clergy, which, assuming something beyond Apostolic power, had departed entirely from Apostolic humility and poverty.

The revolt comprised three classes, of which the first originated under Peter of Bruys who perished in the flames of St. Gilles in Languedoc, but whose mantle fell with added power upon Henry the Deacon. Now a book might be written upon this man, upon his extraordinary personality, his vibrant voice, the wonderful magnetism of his individuality, of his work amongst lost women. The tale might be told of how people turned from the great Pope Hildebrand himself, rejecting him, crying—"We already have our spiritual father in Henry the Deacon," but space fails for such relation, as also for an account of the second class led by Peter Waldo of Lyons. We must press on to the third, to the most

[1] Milman's Latin Christianity.

pernicious doctrine of all, that of Manicheism, which was to bring woe and desolation upon all the fair land of Provence, and to send Bertrand of Crein and Rosamunde of Tracey along the crimson path of its history.

No easy matter to define its tenets. A wild, half-poetic, half-rationalistic theory of Christianity colored by the ancient Eastern heresies whence it sprang, it appeared suddenly in the twelfth century in Bulgaria, on the borders of the Greek Empire, then in Italy, France, Germany, in the remoter West, and at the foot of the Pyrenees. Manicheism asserted two co-equal conflicting gods of good and evil, insisted upon a stern asceticism, and proscribed marriage or only reluctantly conceded to it or to any connection between the sexes. It asserted the eternity of matter, and its implacable hostility to spirit, and denied the reality of the suffering Christ.

And the chief seat of this heresy was in Toulouse, capital of the fairest and richest country in the Pope's spiritual domain.

When Lothair of Segna became Pope Innocent III. at the age of thirty in 1198, he found the whole of Provence in open revolt against Latin Christianity, and from that time until this year of 1208 which saw Rosamunde riding south to her marriage, there had been a never-ceasing effort on Rome's side to whip the erring flock back to the fold. Pierre of Castelnau, stern papal legate, had traveled the country uttering fruitless threats and fulminations. Raymond of Toulouse and his great nobles summoned to prosecute, exile, and slay their heretic subjects, had refused. Innocent thundered in vain. The people remained obdurate. Then, like a star dawning upon the gloom of Rome's helplessness, appeared Dominic of Calahorra in old Castile. He was of noble birth, and a devotee from childhood. Later on, when his fame had

spread abroad, legends many and various were told of his birth. Thus his mother dreamed she gave birth to a boy with a torch in his mouth which set the world on fire—at his baptism a starry radiance encircled the font. Arrived at manhood his zeal had developed unswervingly. His charity was unbounded. He sold all he had and gave it to the poor. Men spoke of the intensity of his prayer, which rendered him insensible to his earthly surroundings. One night as he prayed, the devil, wishing to trouble him, threw an enormous stone from the roof of the Church, which, falling to earth with a crash, grazed the hood of the monk's robe without in any way disturbing him from his prayer. Thereupon, the devil fled, howling.

When the Bishop of Osma in Spain reformed his chapter according to the rules of St. Augustin, Dominic joined the brotherhood, and accompanied the bishop on a mission to negotiate the marriage of Alphonso VIII. of Castile with a Danish princess. Their journey through Provence made them acquainted with the heresy rampant all over that country, and from that time Dominic associated himself with the efforts to destroy it. His genius perceived the error of Rome's methods. Publicly he rebuked the legates who traveled in costly attire with vast cavalcades, and adjured them to "go barefoot without purse or scrip like the apostles. Out-labor, out-fast, out-discipline these false teachers."

So he admonished the papal legates whom he met in all their pomp on the road to Montpellier. And setting the example himself, the luxury-loving bishops for very shame were perforce obliged to follow him, and dismounting from their mules, walked barefoot into the city.

His genius and fanatic zeal won him great favor from

the Pope. The austerity of his life was a powerful factor in his influence. Day by day his authority waxed in Rome. Yet in Provence even he failed to destroy the new spirit of liberty which Rome held damnable. The full days of his power were yet to come when he should trap a shuddering world beneath the spring of that horror which was to render his name accursed throughout the ages. The Inquisition was yet unborn.

So sped the years in vain endeavor, and now Rome was driven by desperation to urge others to that shedding of blood which would have been a sin in her. But success still faltered on the way. Pierre of Castelnau and Foulquet of Toulouse were coming empty of promise from the French king. The work was still to do, would be done. Heaven send a man to save the smiling country from greedy blood-stained clutches.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE next day Dominic set forth to Citeaux with an escort provided by the duke, and left Sens close on the heels of Bertrand's party. Gaining upon them, he fell into earnest talk with Foulquet and Pierre, and for a while his presence went unnoticed by Bertrand, who led the troop. Black King missed the bright chestnut to-day. He hung behind with men between, and carried a silent lady.

Long had Foulquet talked with her, striving to undo the harm wrought by Alfor. Frankly he admitted the plague-spots festering in the sanctity of the Church, yet, he pleaded earnestly, such abominations could not really dim the glory of the true faith, which like a flaming beacon beckoned its people to follow the Cross and do battle against the powers of darkness. Skillfully he turned the matter into a personal channel. She had seen the need of the Church, and was she not going into the very hell of heresy? Let her work be to refute pernicious doctrine, let her shine forth in zeal for Holy Church, and let that work commence in the household of her future husband, an avowed heretic.

She listened attentively, then lifted intelligent eyes to his.

"Good father, as I understand it, the count's quarrel lies not with Holy Church, but with her preceptors."

"Instruments chosen by Heaven to work its will upon earth."

"Heaven chooses strangely sometimes," said she, and Foulquet winced.

"St. Anthony himself suffered temptation, and you are a fair woman, my daughter. Turn your beauty to the service of the Church, and bring Gervaudan back to the fold."

She thought on all she had witnessed during this journey. The unchristian hatred Foulquet bore to Bertrand, the martyrdom of Blanche of Arroy, whom neither priest had stirred to save, the laxity of the archbishop in the matter of the abbess, Yvonne's wild revelations, that orgy in the crypt, Alfor's hands desecrating herself —all this rushed into her mind, and her lip curled as she made answer.

"Show me first an honest priest, good father, that faith may be proved by works to my lord, who himself is but a plain straight man."

She had not ridden in company with Bertrand of Crein for nothing. A fortnight ago she would not have dared to judge a priest.

Foulquet recognized the danger so surely that he put forth a superhuman effort for restraint. Not the cudgel of fulmination was needed here, but the fine thrust of a poison which should leave a sting.

"There are honest priests in plenty for your need," said he with cold dignity. "Such talk is unseemly—I use a gentle word, daughter—on a woman's lips. Yet are you not to blame, seeing who has defiled your ears. But if you must listen to the enemies of Holy Church, I pray you pick your teaching among gentlemen, not from a scullion unused to politer usage than that learnt in his father's kitchen."

How surely had he struck! She flushed, then went deadly pale, half rose from her chair, then sank back.

"A scullion!"

First amazement, then disgust shook her very soul. Foulquet could have laughed aloud. He knew the pride of the northern nobility, and Rosamunde of Tracey claimed kinship with kings.

"Count Bertrand's father was Jehan of Born, scullion to Bertrand of Born, who gave him freedom and the countship of Crein on the day he saved his master's life. A scullion, Lady Rosamunde, a cleaner of greasy dishes. Will you be guided by such?"

He made her a deep bow, whose irony went unperceived, and left her, well pleased with his work.

Good cause had he, God knows. Here was a woman to whom pride of birth was the breath of life. All who were not noble did not exist for her and her class. Such unfortunates were "things," to be well or badly used, according to their owner's humor. Their excuse for living was the service they rendered. And Bertrand of Crein had a scullion for father!

It did not matter that to-day he was ennobled. Such nobility went for nothing in the north. There a man must show a dozen quarterings upon his shield to prove his title. What had Bertrand? A sauce pot and a rag! She forgot the roses. The smell of the kitchen stifled their fragrance. A scullion! Dear Mary in Heaven, what had that mad nun cried? "Your lover!"

She quivered all over. Her lover! Hers, Rosamunde of Tracey, cousin to the king!

So much for Bishop Foulquet's sting and a sleepless night. Now she rode between Enid and Bûchon, her face shrouded by her hood, tortured by her thoughts. What madness had come upon her in the convent garden? Sweet dalliance with—a scullion! And that same night he had held her in his arms, and looked at her——

And she had taunted him for what she read in his eyes! Saints of God, would the shame never burn less cruelly!

Bertrand rode in front, grim of countenance. Much occupied his mind. Plans worked in his brain. He had learned enough last night to realize what a very real danger loomed upon his country. Now the half-threat uttered by Philippe Auguste assumed a more ominous character, now he understood what "cross" Ponthieu should have taken. Would Count Raymond understand as well? Would he act in time before the wolves of northern Europe, led by the monks of Citeaux, swept down to ravage smiling Provence?

Such a fever of impatience to reach Toulouse assailed him that more than once he almost clapped spurs into Black King, and shouted to his men to gallop. But the hindrance of the women checked him. Women! He had looked into a woman's eyes and forgotten his friend!

They had left Sens two miles behind, and were entering the confines of the gloomy forest lying between them and Auxerre before he became aware of the addition to their party. For a moment he hesitated, being minded to send Dominic about his business, but reflection showed him that he could not forbid him the road, and prudence suggested that Burgundy's men would be a welcome addition of strength on the perilous journey to Auxerre. For here the forest closed upon them on every side, dark aisles of trees, great caverns of gloomy shrubs, dense thickets of rank undergrowth and tangled weeds. Just such another "Valley of Wormwood" as that forest into which St. Bernard fled from the luxuries of Cluny, and where he lived solitary among wild beasts and savage men, his only food the leaves of the trees, until his power transformed the wilderness into the *Clara Vallis,* the

Bright Valley of St. Bernard, and the great monastery of Clairvaux arose in the desert to bear witness to the glory of God.

When the party halted for the midday dinner, the three churchmen sat apart while the meal was preparing. Plainly they had weighty matters to discuss. Bertrand left them to their talk, and approached to where Rosamunde stood on the bank of a small river which here winding through the forest would presently merge into the Yonne.

If she saw him coming, she made no sign. Something in her attitude checked him. No voice ever warned a man he was not wanted more plainly than did the angle of the graceful shoulder turned from him. He hesitated. Did she still bear malice for that night?

They had not exchanged a word since. She had remained secluded all yesterday, and this morning they had ridden apart. The pricking of his conscience stirred him to resent her obvious displeasure.

"Dinner waits your pleasure, lady!" he said as stiffly as you please.

"Enid will serve me here," came the answer in tones that positively stung. Bertrand stared in amazement, then his already ruffled temper rose higher.

"Will you spoil our friendship for a moment's folly, at which a sensible man and woman should laugh?"

She clenched her hands but dared not trust her tongue. Bertrand's temper went hopelessly astray.

"Is a man held guilty for a look? *Fi donc,* lady, our dames of Provence will give a laugh for a look, and sleep none the less quietly at their husband's side. You make too much of nothing, by my faith."

Then indeed she turned upon him, and he fell back before the wonder of her face. A white complexity of

emotion to which he sought vainly for a clue. Anger he found, hatred, scorn, but what else? What most poignant expression shimmered before his understanding, yet ever eluded it? A woman might have read that shame, but Bertrand had no key then to the riddle.

"Go!" said Rosamunde, lifting a hand that shook. "For services rendered, you have my thanks and this——" She threw a purse at his feet. "My lord of Gervaudan shall explain why he sent a scullion's son to bring me to his house."

She was merciless in her wrath, not unabsurd, yet rage ever swept her beyond the bounds of reason, and swamped her sense of due proportions. Moreover, she was pricked by a maddening sting, and seized upon words to ease her smart.

In the meantime her rage acted as a douche upon Bertrand's own temper. He saw the humor of it, having this advantage, that in Provence a man's nobility rested upon his own worth, and pride in ancestry came second to pride in self. Moreover, while none had ranked higher in valor than his father, he knew the esteem in which all Languedoc held himself, and he could afford to suffer this northern lady's pride without the faintest resentment. But understand it he could not. A smile twitched the corners of his mouth.

"My father was a good scullion and a brave knight. I grieve that he distresses your ladyship," he said.

He dared to laugh. So far apart were these two in their point of view, but his face changed when she snatched the dagger from her girdle.

"A serf!" she panted, "a common kitchen dog!" and she struck at him in her fury as high-born ladies were used to strike the low born who offended them. But Bertrand caught her wrist, and took the knife from her,

and they stood eye to eye, he grim enough now, but cool, she all flushed with rage.

"I have yet to bring you safely to Toulouse, my lady," said he, and with that he put the dagger into her limp fingers, made her a low bow, and was striding away when the glitter of the purse on the ground caught his eye. A moment he paused, then stooped and picked it up. Again he hesitated, now angered, now fiercely mirthful, came at last to a decision, and fastened the gaud to the chain slung round his neck, from which it dangled upon his breast beneath the three red roses.

"I will hold it in trust for your better understanding," quoth he, and, bowing, went off to his dinner.

She stared after him, then turned, and hiding in the shelter of the trees, wept as though to break her heart.

Here Gaston the page found her. He brought her dinner, and knelt to serve her with his boyish face red and confused.

"May it please your ladyship," he stammered.

She kept her head averted to conceal her tears.

"Well, boy!"

"Your ladyship—my lady—I am to serve you, if you will suffer me. I am—Count Bertrand bade me say it—my father, the lord of Nimes, was kinsman to Queen Eleanour of Guyenne."

He hung his head abashed. Rosamunde pushed aside the dish he tendered.

"Count Bertrand bade you say it," she repeated in a choked voice.

"Ay, my lady. Will you not eat?"

"I have no appetite," then marking his disappointment, she gave him her hand to kiss. "You will make a very gentle page, Gaston, but go now. I would be alone."

He departed, carrying the rejected food, and Margot

came running to him. "Hi, Gaston," she called, "come hither and see the nest Bûchon has found. Five blue eggs and the mother thrush watching from the branch above. You'll not touch them, Gaston."

He forgot his chagrin, and putting down the plate, followed Margot to the bush which held the nest. The two children stood gloating over their find, her bright curls mingling with his darker hair as they bent together to count the eggs and examine their beauty.

A harsh voice broke upon their joy. They looked up startled, and shrank before the piercing gaze of the Spanish monk.

"At what do you look so eagerly?" asked Dominic.

They pointed dumbly to the nest. A frown darkened his already somber features.

"Have a care lest this enthralment which holds you be not a snare of Satan," he said in awful tones.

All the joy died from the children's faces. They wilted in terror. Margot's eyes filled, but Gaston plucked at courage.

"'Tis but a thrush's nest, holy father," he faltered. "See, the mother bird watches from the branch."

"And how will you be sure of that?" answered the monk impressively. "'The devil can transform every being,' said Albert le Grand. And again what saith Saint Thomas, 'Every change formed of nature can be imitated by the devil.' Therefore take heed lest enchanted by this sight, you fall headlong into some devilish snare of the Evil One to the imperilling of your immortal souls."

His voice was so harsh, his words so terrifying that the boy and girl shook with fright. Their innocent joy in God's handiwork was destroyed. Now they cowered from it in deadly fear.

But another had heard Dominic's words. Bertrand stood beside them, and put a protecting hand on each little quivering shoulder.

"You shall blight no child's life with foul monkish lies while I stand by," he cried. "Run off, little brats. Enjoy the life God gives you, and heaven preserve us from these monks, who deny His Creation, and blaspheme the work of His hands."

The children ran away. Dominic lifted flaming eyes to Bertrand.

"If you set at naught the lessons of the Church, how will you guard the innocent from the power of Satan, sir count?"

"By teaching them the power of God," retorted Bertrand. "Now hasten, father, if you would travel in our company. We must find a fit camp for the night's rest. Heaven send us no deadlier enemy than your poor thrush."

His mocking laughter rang through the wood as he went forward to order the move. Dominic sought his horse, his dark face working with emotion, and as he rode through the forest he fervently uplifted his soul in supplication. "In the day of wrath, oh Mary, Mother of Heaven, adjure Thine Son, that of all heretics and blasphemers, this Bertrand of Crein may suffer most, and that through torments unspeakable his soul be brought to repentance." Thus ran the tenor of his prayer.

CHAPTER XIX

IT took them three days to reach Auxerre, and in all that time no word passed between Bertrand of Crein and the proud lady he escorted. On the march he rode in front, she behind with Enid. In camp, Gaston waited on her orders. His the task to translate her wishes to the commander had she expressed any, but seemingly her needs were filled, since not once did she employ the young ambassador. The weather was fine and warm, and sleeping in the sweet forest air no hardship. The road went smoothly, and the obvious metal of the party kept thieves and murderers at a respectful distance. All made for a pleasant journey, save the company. The three churchmen rode ever together, tolerated by the Burgundians, hated by the Provençals, avoided by Rosamunde, ignored by Bertrand. Margot and Gaston still trembled at the memory of Dominic's rebuke and took heed to hide their laughter. Enid suffered from her mistress's humor, and her own vexation at losing Bûchon's company. He kept like a dog at Bertrand's heels, and because his master frowned hung a sour face upon his breast.

"And just when the creature was learning to comb his beard, and could mark the color of my wimple," reflected the irate tirewoman. "Saints, what devil's stew of sick fancy has she fallen into to set us all by the ears!"

If Foulquet appreciated his handiwork he was too

clever to betray his triumph, and took heed not to thrust his company upon Rosamunde.

There were times, however, when Dominic joined her, and poured forth his eloquence to fan her zeal. Then she heard the story of his preaching throughout the south, shrank a little from his frenzy, marvelled to see the tears stream down his face as he recounted his failures and bewailed the damnation of the lost.

To all of which Rosamunde listened politely, and scarcely heard one word in ten. Her indifference could not escape him, and on the day before they reached Auxerre he taxed her with it. They had finished the midday meal, and were waiting for the horses to be untethered. Rosamunde's eyes looked haunted.

"What troubles your mind, my daughter?" said the monk quite suddenly, thereby throwing her off the guard of her complexion, which flushed, then paled. Her lips, however, remained staunch.

"I have no trouble, holy father."

His dark eyes pierced to her soul and read its tumult.

"Denial is useless, my daughter."

Then her nerves snapped.

"And interference is unwelcome, my father."

But Dominic's face kindled. "Bring your grief to Christ, Lady Rosamunde. He shall comfort you."

"Grief!" Her face burned with pride. "For what should I grieve! You mistake, holy father, my mind goes free."

"Why lie to me?" said Dominic impressively. "Confess rather, that I may absolve your soul, and bring peace to your heart."

Confess to another what she denied to herself! She could have laughed in his face.

"I thank you, my father, but I have nothing to confess."

"The Church lays her command upon you," he insisted.

She was saved further argument by the appearance of Bertrand leading the chestnut horse, with Gaston beside him. He spoke gravely to the boy.

"Instruct her ladyship that her servant, Bertrand of Crein, waits humbly upon her desire to mount and continue the journey."

Gaston knelt and repeated the words. Rosamunde barely inclined her head. Then she was lifted and set upon the chestnut. Thus it happened every day, and every day she saw her purse lying beneath the roses on his breast. To-day she saw more, for whereas she had previously avoided ever looking at him, it chanced now that in seating herself upon the saddle she slipped. Bertrand saved her, and for one moment their eyes met. The merry smile she knew of old danced in his. Then did her attitude toward him go for naught save his amusement?

He bowed courteously, and left her to take his place at the head of the men who adored him. It came to her understanding then that Bertrand of Crein would suffer from no other opinion of his worth save his own. Here was a man who, certain of his own value, would let the world go hang—herself with it.

A sudden fear chilled her heart, as if some wall of defense in which she trusted had been cast down. A mist swam before her eyes. When it cleared she became conscious of Gaston's voice chatting to Margot as the children trotted close behind.

"Such dances and such feasts in the court of Count Raymond at Toulouse! And, Margot, such tourneys!

You never saw a more gallant assembly of valorous knights."

Rosamunde lost Margot's answer, but Gaston's voice reached her clearly.

"He is bravest of all. My father chose him from every knight in Provence for me to serve. 'Model yourself upon Count Bertrand of Crein for valor and skill at arms, for courtesy and good faith, and so shall you maintain the greatness of our house of Nîmes,' said my father. Now Christ help me to it," added the youthful voice, and Rosamunde turned in her saddle and glimpsed his face, all flushed and alight with worship of his hero.

Bertrand, the scullion's son chosen by Thibault of Nîmes, kinsman to Queen Eleanour, as model for the scion of the lordly house! Truly a topsy-turvy world this into which she journeyed! Small wonder that he laughed at her!

They lodged one night at Auxerre, that town of song and dance and joyous fêtes, and pushed on the next day toward Avallon. The evening brought them upon a band of Provençal merchants bound for the same town, en route to Avignon. They joined forces, and Rosamunde sat before her tent and listened to the songs round the camp fires. The monks held apart in gloomy disapproval which went for naught among these merry southern rogues. Song and dance were the breath of life to them. Small regard had they for the frown of a priest.

Presently Rosamunde saw Bertrand among the group. He held a lute, and seemed also in singing mood.

"What will you have, friends?" he cried. "A chant of war? A lilt of love? Listen now to Count Walter's sweetness:

"Under the linden,
Amid the heather,
There where our place of resting was,
There might ye finden,
Fair together,
Broken flowers and broken grass
By the woodside in a dale;
Tandaradei,
Sweetly sang the nightingale."

The rich voice filled the silence of the summer evening. A round of applause followed, and Bertrand laughed, and struck an attitude.

"To our field meeting
Stole I at even,
There was my true love come before!"

—the face of Yvonne the nun rose before Rosamunde's vision. Bertrand sang on,

"So sweet was his greeting
(Lady of Heaven!),
That I am blessed for evermore."

She clasped her hands upon her knees. Dear Heart of Mary in Heaven, did all the men of Provence sing like this?

"Kissed he me? Yea, a thousandfold!
Tandaradei,
See, my red lips are not yet cold."

One heard the very triumph of love in his voice as he rang out the words. His listeners made the forest echo to shouts of praise, but when he looked toward the tent, Rosamunde no longer sat there and the flap was closed.

It so happened that a certain great Provençal knight bound for Carcassonne rode with the merchants. He was

one Philippe, Count of Albret and kinsman to the Viscount of Béziers who was nephew to Count Raymond himself. An elderly man and very gentle, he was also one of the most renowned soldiers in the south. Now he could not fail to mark the strained attitude of this knight and lady toward each other, and it offered him a puzzle. Bertrand of Crein was his friend, yet if he had failed in any way whatever toward one whom he was bound by every law of chivalry to protect, then it devolved upon Philippe as a true knight to champion her wrongs. Riding at her side the next morning, he ventured a tentative remark. Rosamunde turned grave eyes upon him.

"Count Bertrand has shown himself a gallant, courteous—gentleman," she said.

Count Philippe marked the hesitation.

"You may dub him 'gentleman' and he'll not shame the courtesy." Light flashed upon him. "You savor the kitchen over strongly," he smiled. "When you have learned to know Provence you shall find scents stronger than the odor of a sauce-pot. We have an aristocracy of noble minds, and of valor which is our boast. With us men are rewarded for what they are, not for what their fathers were. If you quarrel with a man for lack of quarterings you will be at odds with half of Raymond's court."

She heard him quietly, then smiled and bowed with a little air of dismissal, accepting which, he joined Bertrand at the head of the troop and forthwith they plunged into earnest talk.

For Count Philippe had been traveling in Flanders and England before returning home through northern France, and he told a tale of the Cistercian monks and their preaching which deepened the lines in Bertrand's

forehead. He had come across these preachers in every town and village, in castle and cottage, and all their exhortations were the same. A crusade against the south, and for reward spiritual and material gain greater than any man had been promised before.

"*Ventre-Dieu,* do I not know it?" swore Bertrand. "Do I not carry three of these damned spies with me? But for my word to King Philippe they should hang on the nearest tree."

Then he repeated the warning given by Roger of Sens, and after that told what he himself had overheard between Foulquet and the Duke of Burgundy. Count Philippe's face grew black.

"And you will spare this foul traitor Foulquet? God's death, *I* have given no promise."

"Then you must come at him over me," said Bertrand doggedly. "Let him be, friend. One more or less does not matter. Now will Raymond fight?"

"To save his kingdom! Who shall doubt it?"

They rode on absorbed in talk of this conflict which both perceived so clearly descending upon their beloved land. Joy shone darkling in their eyes. To fight was to live, even though death trod swift behind. Moreover, they never doubted the issue, but plainly saw Philippe of France deposed, and Raymond of Toulouse upon his throne.

That same evening when again the camp fires burned red in the leafy forest, Rosamunde sent Gaston to Bertrand with a request for his presence.

He found her very white and cold, with frozen eyes and marble lips.

"Sir," she said. "Will you return my purse? I find myself the poorer for your gain."

A dull red flushed his temples. Here was an apology.

More, an abasement. For one moment he felt a revengeful exultation, then he was hurt beyond all telling to think what this must have cost her. He could have knelt in the dust at her feet.

"It was natural," he said gently. "You did not understand."

"I am learning," she answered in even tones. "The purse, I pray you."

He unfastened it from the chain, opened it, and took a gold piece from it.

"By your fair leave," dropping the purse into her hand. "This ducat shall be the guerdon of my service to the noblest lady I have ever met."

She knit her brows; then,

"I cannot be your debtor for such generosity," she said with curt disclaimer.

"Generosity!" A sudden fire shone in his blue eyes. "Thanks be to God for the low birth which has crowned me with great honor. The longest pedigree in France must go hungry for what you have given the scullion's son this day."

It was not easy to uphold the shield of chill reserve before the hot rush of his glowing impetuosity, but he had knelt to kiss the hem of her robe, and so did not see the face she bent above his head. When he rose she simply bowed, and went back to the tent with the purse in her hand, and if the mask dropped then, there was none to see.

But the next morning, she checked Gaston's little speech, and turned directly to Bertrand.

"I am ready," she said.

He swung her to the saddle, and thus they rode together, friends again. But never more in the old frank comradeship. A veil hung between them. She might

not lift it, he dared not. Reconciliation brought deep peace to both, yet threatened both with an unrest which was too sweet for safety. They understood that enmity would have been the best arm of defense. Strange paradox that virtue should dwell secure in hatred, while sweet charity offered a nest to sin!

But Rosamunde was too much a creature of impulse, too generous in spite of her arrogance to withhold an amende, so plainly demanded of her justice. And if justice here went hand in hand with desire, why, she was but a woman, glimpsing for the first time in the summer of her beauty, the secrets of life's delight. And if she shut willful eyes to the future! God save us, have none of us lived for a day and repented a year—maybe have lived that day without repentance, and have paid the price unmurmuring for the sake of the joy it brought?

And Bertrand, Count of Crein! He went blithely that morning, singing for very gladness of heart. His eyes may also have been shut—maybe not. Did not three roses lie upon his breast, the third for success, with that golden ducat swinging beneath it to bear witness to one victory at least? And he had not yet learnt to deny himself much that he wanted.

Time enough, time enough, sang the birds in the trees. Venus Aphrodite, how the sunshine glinted in Rosamunde's eyes!

Dame Enid also smiled again, for Bûchon fell into his old place beside her mule, and though he rarely spoke, he was a good listener, and, moreover, a goodly man to look upon in these days of his development. The big frame had filled out, he carried his head erect and kept hair and beard trimmed, so that two fine gray eyes became visible in his tanned face. True, he was not a gay companion. More than one man in the company

asked no better than to amuse Dame Enid with song and laughter, but whether in gratitude or perverseness, she apparently set her fancy upon this morose Bûchon, who scarcely ever threw a word to her prattle. She chid him now for his silence.

"Where in the lud's name are your thoughts bogged?" she asked petulantly. "Here am I asking you three times if my wimple sets straight."

"Straight enough," he answered absently. "Dame, these merchants say that hell is not more glutted with sinners than the southern towns with Saracens."

"Saracens be hanged!" she muttered beneath her breath. "And the wimple suiting me so vastly!"

"Maybe I'll find trace of my Blanche yet," he pursued.

The yearning in his voice immediately touched Enid to compunction for her temper.

"The saints bring her back to you," she said softly.

"Ay!" muttered Bûchon. "How?"

What could he hope for? Enid had no comfort to give him. They fell into silence, he brooding, she restless. Just in front went the churchmen. Be very certain that Foulquet marked at whose side Lady Rosamunde traveled. His frown may be sworn to also. He had been so sure of her pride.

Yet failing here, he drew nigh a possibility which smoothed the frown, for he saw friendship split for a woman's face, and in the enmity of two great houses, perceived Rome's opportunity arising.

The afternoon of that day found them clearing the forests, and here they met the abbess of a neighboring convent, who was faring to Avallon with her train of nuns. The lady rode most bravely attired in gray and scarlet. Her fifty nuns were more simply garbed, but there was a sufficient jingle of luxuriousness about the

cortège to bring a frown to Dominic's eyes. He listened in silence to the abbess, who explained that she and her flock were on their way to witness the burning of a most flagrant heretic—some woman, she believed, who denied the holy sacrament of marriage. Bertrand pricked up his ears. This denial was one of the chief accusations brought by Rome against his own people. The abbess, however, could give him no detailed information—knew neither the age nor station of the woman, was certain only of one essential, namely her burning.

As they crossed the open ground before the town, yet another cavalcade approached at right angles to themselves.

An abbot in all his glory flooded the plain with an escort of six hundred horsemen. Such a stamping of horses' feet, such a rattle of harness and a jingling of steel, such a flash of color in the gaudy vestments as the procession advanced! The abbot himself rode clad in the utmost gorgeousness of his clerical splendor. Silk and satin, purple and gold, jewels round his neck, jewels flashing on his hands. A saddle cloth of amber velvet covered his horse, with a deep gold fringe sweeping the ground on either side. Immediately behind him came a troop of choir boys clad in scarlet cassocks and lace-hung surplices. They sang as they walked, and the solemn chant pealed forth melodiously upon the evening air, while after them came the main body of the escort.

The abbot rode on in his magnificence. An acolyte walked at his right hand, and another at his left, the first carrying a silver flagon of rose-water for the cooling of his face, heated unbearably beneath the weight of the jewelled miter, the second bearing a gilt flagon of wine for the cooling of his thirst. And before him went two men supporting an enormous golden cross upon which

every ray of the sinking sun appeared to concentrate, turning it into even such another dazzling beacon as of old guided the Israelites to their promised goal.

But here seemingly went a pillar of fire less to the taste of the people of Avallon than that of Moses had been to his followers. For as the procession drew nigh to the town, a crowd of men and women came forth through the gates to meet it. Not in reverence, but with groans and hisses and vile names, with a stone to knock the silver ewer from the acolyte's hands, and more than one daub of mud to dim the splendor of that amber saddle cloth.

It so happened that Bertrand at the head of his company, with the abbess and her train of nuns, met the abbot and his procession some hundred yards before the gate of the town, and found the way blocked by the before mentioned crowd. The abbot looked alarmed. Bertrand smiled grimly. Foulquet, Dominic, and Pierre of Castelnau were plainly ill at ease, while the abbess had no cause for rejoicing in the epithets which came her way.

A man in quaint motley garb separated from the mob and capered oddly between abbess and abbot, with waggish nodding head pointing from one to the other. Suddenly he ceased his antics, and delivered himself solemnly of this speech:

"The canon of Dilectissimis, in exhorting the world to the practice of this axiom, '*Tout est commun entre amis,*' does not even except the favors of women."

He concluded with a flourish of his tattered cap to the abbess, and a bow to the abbot.

Both were scarlet in their mortification, but the crowd rocked with laughter.

"A gay pair," shouted a voice. "See her fripperies of

vair and sendal! See how our lord abbot shines to the glory of heaven——"

"And the curse of the world," shrilled a woman's voice. "Who refused to bury my boy, fault of the money he had not left the priest! May he rot in hell as my son rots unburied in the fields."

"Who would not baptize my babes until a week's wage rattled in his coffers," cried another, and the shouts continued.

Who would not bless this marriage, hear that confession, administer the sacrament to the dying! Who extorted offerings for blessings—the blessings of the fields, the gardens, wells, fountains, newly built houses, blessings on grapes, on beans, on lambs, on cheese, fruit, and honey; blessings for cattle in time of pestilence, of salt given to flocks, blessings on swords, daggers, standards, the blessing of betrothal, and even the blessing on the wine which the priests made the two lovers drink!

These taxes and a hundred more the clergy exacted from the people. Small wonder that the latter growled when the fruit of their toil came shimmering and jewel-clad among them.

But their broken spirits were not yet tuned to greater rebellion than such a demonstration as this. A few epithets, a few stones, a little mud, then the Bishop of Avallon's guard, very active that day in the streets, got wind of the matter, and hurried to the deliverance of their brethren.

A short tussle, desultory knocks given and taken, and the bishop's men opened a way into the town. Abbot and abbess hurried through with some loss of dignity, and a scattered train. Bertrand took his people in at his leisure, while the merchants naturally passed unmolested.

And high above the crowd, piercing the ears of the retreating ecclesiastics, shrilled the voice of the motley jester:

"Abbot and abbess a goodly pair,
Clothed in ermine and richest vair,
Who paid the cost of the jewels' sheen?
The poor man sweated the price, I ween."

CHAPTER XX

ROSAMUNDE lay that night with Enid and Margot in a convent of the Poor Clares, the priests found hospitality in the bishop's palace, while Bertrand, with Count Philippe and the soldiers, made a shift at one of the evil, filthy taverns which passed muster as inns during those medieval times. They stirred very early the next morning. Word had reached Bertrand from the palace that in view of the execution fixed for noon, he would do wisely to leave the town before the streets became too crowded. Perceiving the hostile attitude of the people toward the three priests he escorted as they rode towards the southern gate, he took the warning as their own desire to be quit of Avallon before harm came upon them. The populace seemed in an ugly mood. The shops were closed and human beings poured from every house and hovel, all bent in one direction—towards the square. On every side one heard exclamations of disgust and pity, saw angry eyes, caught a volley of oaths and execrations.

Even at that early hour it was not possible to move quickly through the streets. The crowd was loose, but now and again closed up with ugly little rushes towards that part of Bertrand's company where Dominic and Pierre of Castelnau rode, conspicuous in their frocks. There was really no more danger to be apprehended,

however, than from a handful of mud or a stray stone. The soldiers moved forward good-humoredly, shielding the priests, and avoiding the toes of Avallon, who had no quarrel with them.

The bishop's men-at-arms also appeared on the scene, driving the people here and there, and striving to maintain some semblance of order. But the crowd was not tractable, and plainly held the bishop's men in hatred. One of the latter struck a refractory citizen with his long staff. At once a dozen men leaped at him, and he was badly handled before his comrades could rescue him. Then the fight became general. Women screamed, children were trampled under foot in the rush. For a few minutes the street was filled with the swaying, fighting mob, men shouting, women shrieking.

Bertrand found himself checked against the projecting door of a small shop. Count Philippe and the men halted behind him. It was impossible to advance, useless to retreat. He flung a backward glance to be assured of Rosamunde's safety, then resigned himself to getting what diversion he might from watching the tumult.

The fight was looser just here, and he saw a man separate from the main body, and come speeding towards himself, hotly pursued by two of the bishop's men. He made straight for Bertrand, who recognized him as the motley man of last night; he who mocked the abbot. To-day his motley was more ragged than ever, and blood ran down his face. But he laughed as he ran, and, gaining upon Bertrand, dodged behind Black King into safety.

The bishop's men looked at Bertrand. He smiled upon them very affably.

"We have orders to bring this man to the bishop," said they.

"Take him," said Bertrand, and drew more fully across their path.

He was so plainly a contingency unforeseen by his reverence, that the two worthies may be excused in finding no help for it but to leave him in possession. They departed forthwith, and Bertrand laughed, well content.

A hand plucked his mantle. He turned in the saddle to find that the motley one had swung up on the roof of the projecting shop door, and from that level was staring at him with curious, intent eyes.

"*Crein ne rien crain,*" he said. "I know your house, my lord."

"My knowledge goes in debt to yours," answered Bertrand with the genial camaraderie which made him so universally popular.

"I am from Albi, lord. I drifted"—he made a vague gesture—"some wind blew me here. Hark now, will you have a warning for the life you saved?"

"A warning!"

"Hist, lord, bend nearer. The very walls have ears." Clinging to his perch with one hand, he leaned forward and touched one of the roses on Bertrand's yellow surcoat.

"Red rose of war! I tell you, sir, that in a short time there shall not be seen a flower in Languedoc which is not stained as deep, ay, deeper than the white rose of Hautefort. Rivers shall run blood, men shall weep blood for their women and children, who shall weep no more. Woe! Woe! Woe for the lord in his castle, for the peasant in his cottage. Woe for the happy song and dance, woe for the dark-eyed Saracen maidens of Narbonne, woe for their gay gallants. And woe! woe! woe! for him who could save his land but will not."

He had spoken very low and very quickly. At first

Bertrand listened as to the wanderings of a disordered brain, but the last words touched a cord of latent doubt in his own mind, and he looked up quickly.

"What are you saying, fellow?"

Those strange eyes never flinched under his keen gaze.

"In the days of tribulation you shall remember the words of poor Mark of Albi—jester once in the court of Raymond V. of Toulouse."

"Mark of Albi!" repeated Bertrand.

"Ay, sir. I served the late count. His son had no use for me. I drifted." Again that vague gesture. "I knew your father, but you, sir, shall dye the first rose more redly than he left it."

A bell tolled suddenly upon the air. At the sound the crowd suddenly ceased fighting as by mutual consent, and began rushing pell-mell towards the market-place. The bishop's men were carried away by the torrent, and another few minutes would see Bertrand's road open. The expression of the jester's eyes changed. The glow faded, and a mocking smile twisted his lips.

"He! he!" he cackled. "'Tis a quaint world gone mad, my masters. A maid shall burn naked for her chastity, while the bishop's leman in silk attire shall look on from a palace window."

"Now what the devil do you mean by such loose talk?" asked Bertrand.

"Why, sir, the priests do call her heretic, and swear she denies the holy sacrament of marriage. But all the town knows that Sieur Gervase, cousin to the bishop himself, saw this sweet maid, and being fired by her beauty, would have her love him *par amors*. Which she refusing for her soul's salvation, he denounced her to the Church as one of that sect called Manichean, and to-day she burns upon the market-place."

He sprang to the ground, and scraped a grotesque bow.

"Your lordship's humble servant and debtor for the poor life you saved. The devil bring you safe to Languedoc, fair sir, and send you a better reward for virtue than God has shown to the poor maid burning yonder."

With that he hurried off, and disappeared from view, leaving Bertrand to digest the horrible story, and for a brief moment, meditate a rescue.

To reject the idea at once.

Not that he doubted the ability of himself and his men to snatch the girl from the bishop's men and carry her from Avallon, nor that he would take no risk to jeopardize Rosamunde's safety. He had even greater reasons for prudence. Rome already harried his master, Raymond of Toulouse. He could not put another scourge into her hand by such an offense as the tearing of a heretic from her clutches. Heavy at heart for the suffering he might not avert, he led his men out of the town. Rosamunde and Count Philippe rode beside him and listened to the tale of the martyrdom whose smoke even now rose upon the warm, blue sky.

D'Albret clenched his hand in impotent wrath. Rosamunde shuddered. The shadow of the Church seemed to fall upon her at every turn. She felt as it were the invisible pressure of a great horror which sooner or later should take form and engulf her. And behind her came the three grim priests, prophets of her dread.

Now to dwell upon every adventure which befell the company on its journey from Avallon to Cîteaux would take too long. It must suffice to say that all went well, that the sun shone, that hunger and thirst were satisfied. Good-will made light of hardship. To Margot and Gaston, at least, the days succeeded each other in the

delight of an endless picnic, while it seemed to Rosamunde that she dwelt in a realm of golden happiness which had no relation to past and future, but floated like a golden nimbus above the current of her life. She did not ask whither she was drifting. Toulouse lay far, far ahead. Enough for her that she rode through an enchanted country. She would not seek its boundary.

Yet no word passed between her and Bertrand which might not have been shouted to the tree tops, and Count Philippe ever made the third in their company. Indeed, both sought his companionship with an eagerness which delighted the worthy gentleman, who had no reason to doubt their sincerity.

But—but—there came moments when they were alone, and failed miserably; moments when she would look up to find his eyes fixed on her with curious intentness, moments when the ring of his voice set her heart beating too wildly, when the chance touch of her hand set the blood coursing through his veins. And which of them hungered more after those brief seconds in the day when, lifting her to and from the saddle, he held her against his heart! Red rose of love! Red rose of the world! Which gave heed to the thorns?

Thus they journeyed to Cîteaux, and here at the doors of the famous monastery, took leave of stern Dominic, Pierre of Castelnau, and Bishop Foulquet. Rosamunde never saw the two former again, but Foulquet and she had not said good-by forever.

Cîteaux faded behind them, Macon was gained and passed. Still the fine weather held. Every day brought them nearer to Toulouse, every day saw Rosamunde and Bertrand sinking deeper into a golden, treacherous sea of delight. She dubbed it friendship to her heart, and shut her ears to truth. He was more frank with himself,

because less scrupulous. Moreover, it was temptation enough surely for any man to look into those eyes, to see in their clear depths the promise of something wonderful not yet awake, or perhaps stirring in its slumber, and to know that it needed only the touch of his hand upon the strings of her soul to quicken that dormant miracle into life.

Folly of fools! The spell snapped within a day's journey of Lyons, where they met a band of Lombardy merchants on the road, and learned from them that the Count of Toulouse, with his nephew, the Viscount of Béziers and Count Hubert of Gervaudan, were halted in Lyons after a very bloody campaign against some of the Lyonnais nobles.

Bertrand gave her the news, saw her start in the saddle, and watched the joyousness die from her face. She looked at him. His face was blank and ugly.

"Count Hubert is at Gervaudan," she repeated mechanically.

"Yes," said Bertrand.

There really seemed to be nothing worth saying, and as if by mutual consent they finished the day's journey apart, he riding forward with Count Philippe, while she came behind, contemplating a shattered dream.

They camped that night on the bank of a little stream, beneath the forest's leafy vault. Bertrand had posted his sentries, and wakeful himself, paced up and down in the moonlight, within fifty yards of the women's tent. It stood at some distance from where the soldiers and the merchants snored round spent fires. Here the night was still and sweet and hot. The leaves rustled faintly on the branches, the music of fairyland sang in the ripples of the brook.

He paused suddenly in his walk. The flap of the tent

had been drawn back, and Rosamunde stood in the opening clad in a loose white gown, with her hair lying unbound upon her shoulders.

She did not see him in the shadows, but the moon shone full upon her, as she glanced this way and that, and then seemingly assured of her solitude, walked slowly towards the brook and sat down upon a moss-grown boulder.

Bertrand of Crein looked round upon the sleeping camp. Not a stir from the men, not a sound from Philippe d'Albret, rolled in his cloak on the hard ground, or from Bûchon, who lay close by the tent. The sentries were out of sight. To all intents he and Rosamunde were alone in the heart of this soft-scented night.

What then!

His face took on the ugly look which pressure of hard circumstances ever brought to it. He made a step towards her, then checked, remembering how much lay between them—chiefest of all her need of his protection from herself.

"Par la mort Dieu!" blasphemed Bertrand.

Presently he saw the slender shoulders quiver, and knew her weeping. His hands clenched round the hilt of the sword upon which he leaned. There had been women in his life, but he could remember each with a smile. What was this which writhed in his heart as he gazed at the drooping figure, veiled in the cloud of her dusky hair? His friend's bride! Himself bound to bring her safely to her lord, and only the honor of his name to strengthen him against the witchery of her beauty, the music of her laughter, the charm of her petulance! Rose of the World! He touched the rose threaded on his surcoat—rose of fulfilled desire! A Crein to hold it!

Fool! Yonder drooped the Rose of his world, and because she must not bloom for him, Crein held—naught. Time surely to cut the third rose from his device seeing that the vaunt went empty.

Bertrand of Crein ground his teeth. Not for nothing did he carry that full, hungry mouth and iron chin. Let him see her safely married, and the debt paid to his own honor. Time enough to cut off the third rose when Hubert of Gervaudan had proved equal to keeping his wife. *"Gare aux épines, mon ami,"* muttered Bertrand, "I'll take no vow to hate your lady."

In the meantime why in the name of all the saints she worshipped, did she not go back to the tent? Was it not more than a man could endure to see such loveliness in tears for him? To be alone with her in the forest night, all else asleep, only the eye of the moon winking through the trees, urging him to madness! He had held her in his arms on just such another night. The soft, warm touch of her! The curved, white throat, with the dimple calling to his lips!

Passion rioted in him, the hot, fierce passion which loses sight of its object in the need of self gratification.

"Damn you, Hubert of Gervaudan! I hold my own! And she is mine, God knows."

His voice breathing her name, his hand upon her arm. She sprang up with a soft cry which was echoed in Enid's voice, as that faithful soul came to the door of the tent. Waking suddenly, she had missed her lady from her side, feared danger for her, and leaping up, called frantically upon her name.

Her noise waked Bûchon, who jumped to his feet, but scarcely saw the Lady Rosamunde sweep hurriedly behind him into the tent. The flap dropped, and Count

Bertrand stood alone in the moonlight. Bûchon waited, undecided. No one else had moved. Presently Bertrand beckoned to him, and put a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Heaven lies south of the Loire, friend. Never forget I told you that."

He burst into harsh laughter. Bûchon looked at him with the eyes of a troubled dog.

"You know the taste of hell. God, I have just swallowed a dose. Stay by me, friend, till the sickness passes."

Master and man, they paced out the night in silence. Dawn found them staring into each other's haggard faces.

"Friend, you may laugh at an empty boaster," said Bertrand. "Crein holds naught."

"Crein holds my life for what it is worth," muttered Bûchon, and kneeling, kissed Bertrand's foot.

"Did I save your life? I have a harder matter in hand to save my honor. It lies at death's door, and desire treads upon its body with arms outstretched to heaven."

He turned moodily away, and Bûchon with hangdog face for the trouble of the man he worshipped, departed to rouse the camp. Dame Enid smiled unheeded that day. He suffered in Bertrand's suffering as unthinkingly as a dog suffers in the sorrow of his master, dumb as the animal is dumb.

Bertrand sent a man forward to herald their approach, and he went so swiftly that when they came within two miles of the city gates, there was Count Hubert of Gervaudan with a brave array of knights to greet them. He rode forward alone, Bertrand did likewise, and the two friends clasped each other's hands.

Bertrand's visor was down, therefore Hubert could not see his face.

"Your lady is safe," said Bertrand.

"Thank God and you," quoth Gervaudan. "Bring me to her, I pray."

They moved forward to where she sat on the bright chestnut. Count Hubert dismounted, knelt and kissed the hem of her skirt, then rose and kissed her hand.

"May Gervaudan shield your life in peace and joy," he said with very stately courtesy.

She bent her head, but could find no words. The hood concealed her face. His shone clear to her gaze. Likely enough as Foulquet had said, high featured, courtly, kind, but the hair beneath his cap was white and his eyes looked forth from a network of wrinkles. A gallant old man, upright and vigorous yet, but—sixty years had taken their toll of his manhood! Love's mocking laugh rang in her ears, then changed its note to weeping. Rebellion surged within her heart, beat fruitlessly against the prison of her circumstance. And she must nod and smile, and speak and laugh with Count Hubert on her right hand and Count Philippe on her left, and her eyes set upon the yellow plumes nodding above Bertrand's helmet as he led the company into Lyons.

CHAPTER XXI

A WEEK later she was married in the cathedral of St. John amid pomp and splendor, with the flower of Provençal chivalry glittering in attendance, and Count Raymond himself to give the bride away. The wedding festivities must needs wait until Toulouse was reached, but it had been deemed expedient for the marriage to take place at once, and Count Hubert meant to sweep his bride in a veritable royal progression through Languedoc to her future home.

When the time came for her to mount and ride away with her lord, the privilege of lifting her to the saddle was accorded to the knight who had brought her safely to her husband. From the moment of their entry into Lyons, she had not seen Bertrand till now, when he appeared at the door of her chamber to lead her forth.

She was alone save for Enid. Bertrand motioned the latter to leave them, and shut the door upon himself and Rosamunde. She gazed at him and laid her hands upon her breast. God knows what she had suffered, still suffered, but her eyes looked seared, as if a great heat had burnt out their light forever.

And his eyes held rage and pain, and passion thwarted, and a fierce purpose which marred the sometime honesty of his face. Thus they gazed at each other, these two who had never told their love.

Then he spoke, in the dominant, imperious accents he ever used in anger.

"What did I bid you? To judge my honesty at our journey's end. Here ends the journey, and here I put off one honesty and take up another."

His arms went round her and held her helpless in his grip.

"*Je maintiens!*" He laughed wildly into her wild face. "This to pledge me until I redeem it in Toulouse." His lips sought the red flower of her mouth and clung there, drinking its sweetness. She hung supine upon his breast with closed eyes. Did her lips answer his?

He released her. The heavy lids lifted, and for one moment he saw the fire of a soul in heaven, then, black and dreadful, came unalterable pain.

"Coward, oh coward!" she moaned. "Now will you be a thief?"

He caught her hand and kissed the soft pink palm. She wrenched it free in anger.

"All this week have I waited," she panted. "I would have gone had you asked me. I make no god of kingship or of station—for you—Mary help me—you have broken the idol of my pride. But here was a risk you'd not take. *'Crein ne rien crain,'* " she mocked him now in her pain. "I hold my own. I was yours, God knows. Could you not have held me against the world?"

The sweat stood thick on his forehead at her jibes.

"Against heaven and hell," he swore, "but——"

"But! Ay, but—but—but not against King John, nor against Count Raymond——"

"Rosamunde, I swear you do not understand. Provence needs me——"

"And what of me? Have I no need of you? Yet you stood aloof, and saw me wed, and now dare come to me, Rosamunde of Tracey that was, to-day Countess of Gervaudan, and will defile honor and loyalty, and

squirm upon the back staircase of a wanton love! While had you dared be brave and claimed me openly and honorably from my lord, no woman in this world should have crowned you with a greater wealth of love than I had brought to you."

She stood before him in her bridal robes of gold and silver with jewels in her hair and upon her breast, and all her splendor but serving as a frame for her more splendid womanhood. And hovering about her like a palpable nimbus of glory was the love which thrilled her, and swept her and quivered in every atom of her being, trembled in her outstretched hands, sang in her yearning voice, and burned up the tears which trembled behind the wonder of her eyes.

He gazed upon the miracle he had wrought, and the sight shook his very soul. He put out his hands, and his lips muttered as if in prayer.

"You do not understand," he said. "Provence is threatened with a danger that only complete unity amongst her people can prevent. Now if I had taken you from Gervaudan, his house and mine would have been divided. Moreover, the wrath of England would fall again upon my master. King John is Duke of Guyenne, and his men are ever ready to harry us from the East. Rome's claws are tearing us already. What manner of man should I be to betray my country?"

The fire had died away now. She heard him with a fine smile upon her lips.

"I have no quarrel with your patriotism, but—what manner of man are you who will dishonor a woman?"

He made an impatient gesture.

"We hold it no dishonor to love in Provence. There, love is the shrine at which we worship. There, a man

will give his life for one perfect hour of love, and deem the gift a poor one."

Now let her shut her ears to the music of his voice, and cling desperately to her better understanding.

"Love is not all," she said. "Will you betray your friend?"

He laughed. The old tenderness softened his blue eyes.

"Gervaudan is no longer my friend. He is your husband."

She turned her eyes away. With his kiss still burning upon her lips she dared not meet that look.

"I thank you for reminding me," she said faintly. "Now lead me to him."

Bertrand took a step toward her. A dull red burned in his face.

"I shall teach you to forget—in Toulouse."

She shook her head.

"You have made your choice. Let Provence be your mistress. I would have been your wife, Bertrand. I will never be your wanton. Take me to my lord."

Steps echoed in the corridor outside, checking any answer he might have made. The life died from both faces. She twisted a smile upon hers, and he became gravely courteous. Hand in hand they went forth to meet the cheering crowd who could not know the ice of her fingers nor the fire of his.

As he lifted her to the chestnut for the last time, their eyes met again. His were glittering for all he meant yet to win.

"Toulouse," he murmured.

Indomitable, implacable resolve. Her gaze fell upon the roses on his breast, "Rose of the World—fulfillment of all a man desired." Misery stung her to revolt. In

that moment she hated him for the torment she endured. Her eyes burned into his.

"No," she said, "by my immortal soul, no!"

He smiled, then knelt and kissed her hand. The crowd cheered. Hubert of Gervaudan mounted in his turn, and lord and lady rode away at the head of a flashing train of knights. With them, too, went Enid in fretful temper, and little Margot, weeping for her playmate, Gaston, who stayed with his master, and for Bûchon who should guard her no more.

The pleasant days were sped. What remained? To Rosamunde, a memory and a fear that was a lure; to Bertrand, a mad desire and a steady determination to satisfy it.

A hand on his shoulder as he strained his eyes after the receding cavalcade, a voice speaking his name. Roger, the young Viscount of Béziers, stood beside him.

"Count Raymond would see you, Bertrand. A messenger has brought news from Rome."

Young, gallant, an intrepid fighter, a clever soldier, courteous and honorable in his dealings, Roger Travancal, Vicomte de Béziers, at the age of twenty-two, had already won a greater name for himself than the one he held by birth. Just now his handsome face looked very stern.

"My cousin will listen to you, Bertrand." Then as Bertrand did not move, "Nay, man, will you not heed? Where is your mind?"

Bertrand turned at that.

"In the dust," he said, pointing to the cloud which hung upon the disappearing horsemen. "Your pardon, my lord, I talk as a fool. Will you lead me to His Grace?"

Roger of Béziers had no thought to waste on anything

but his own business. He took Bertrand swiftly to the count's door, and there on the threshold paused and eyed his friend. A very intent look passed between the two men.

"Advise him well, Bertrand. There is but one course."

Bertrand nodded silently. The viscount opened the door, and they passed into the presence of Raymond VI., Count of Toulouse.

CHAPTER XXII

RAYMOND, Count of Toulouse, Marquis of Haute Provence, Master of Quercy, of Rouergue, of Vivarais; Conquerer of Maguelone, Duke of Narbonne, Suzerain of Nîmes, Béziers, Uzes, and of the countships of Foix and Comminges in the Pyrennes, stood by the window looking out over the swift-flowing Rhône with eyes that seemed to pierce the barrier of distance, and travel across the snow mountains, far south to Rome itself, into the palace where dwelt the man who had dared to write the letter which even now he held in his hand. The afternoon sun shone full upon him, and showed the splendor of his attire. Purple silk and satin, gold fringe to his mantle, gold chains about his neck, with jewels sparkling in his cap and flashing from his fingers. He was handsome enough for all his forty-eight years, and despite the gray streaks in his hair and beard, quick and alert still, with a brave glint in his eyes. But those who knew him best said he was losing the vigor of youth, and hinted at a new-born caution too closely allied to fear. Yet he had reigned wisely for twelve years, showing himself a clever ruler over semi-republican cities, had known when to concede, when to resist. A great fighter, he had never shrunk from enforcing his suzerainty upon recalcitrant vassals. Shrewdness and foresight sustained his diplomacy. Reconciled to-day with the old enemies of his house, the King of Arragon, who was Count of the Basse

Provence, and the Kings of England, Dukes of Guyenne, he had nothing more to fear from them, and pursued his campaigns upon the Rhône unhindered.

Now here in Lyons at the apex of his triumph came the warning from Rome to stop this campaign upon the pain of interdict. Innocent III., spiritual chief of the world, save only in rebellious Languedoc, was imbued with fanatical zeal, and as positive of his divine right to rule Christendom as that he breathed. In his eyes the Church in this struggle defended a possession God-given. She was the recognized owner, the title-owner of God's laws and decrees. Whoso revolted became heretic, and forever damned.

So much for earnest conviction and ardent espousal of heaven's cause. To this add Rome's gluttony for temporal ascendency and her vindictive hatred of all who thwarted her. If any one would realize how far this same hatred led men into ferocity of expression (followed by greater ferocity of deed) let him read the fulminations of Innocent III. in the letters written to Raymond VI., even in such a letter as the count now held. "Words of ruin and of blood." Let him read of the remorseless determination and of the relentless cruelty of the men who stood ever at the Pope's elbow urging him on in the work of destruction. Foulquet of Toulouse, and Arnaud the abbot of Citeaux, who shall become infamous throughout the ages for certain fearful words spoken at Béziers. Pierre of Vaux-Cernay, also, the fanatic monk-chronicler, who gave thanks to God for every blood-stained cruelty perpetrated upon the doomed people. Nor can one Maitre Theodise, of Notre Dame in Paris, later the able engineer who constructed the engines of war and directed the sieges of the crusade in Provence, be forgotten. For cold, brutal cyn-

icism his taunt to the wretched man who had lost his honor and his country in vain efforts to save both, and who on his knees implored absolution for a crime he had never committed, cannot easily be surpassed. The tears streamed down Raymond's face as he made his supplication.

"In diluvis aquarum multarum ad Deum non approximabis," said the priests ironically, and Raymond had wept in vain.

But this lay in the future. What now of this same Raymond, the most powerful prince in France, and whose ruin was so earnestly coveted! If one believes the Church, he was Satan incarnate, with a list of crimes to his account that will not bear relating. He was accused also, as has been said, of sheltering heretics, even more, of fostering heresy, and of blaspheming against Holy Church.

Later writers have disproved the foul sins attributed to him by Rome. The Benedictine historian, author of an exhaustive history of Languedoc, finds nothing worse to say of him than that he was a gay voluptuary, generous and courageous, but possessing no strength of character to be either heretic or bigot. The truth is that Rome had marked him for destruction and damned him to justify herself.

Several other men stood about the room. Bertrand recognized Roger Raymond, Count of Foix, the Count of Comminges, he who kept four wives, the Viscount of Albi, whose town was to give a name to the bloody war now threatening, Thibault of Nîmes, father to young Gaston, and many others, all gallant knights and very anxious now for guidance from their overlord.

He called Bertrand to him.

"Greeting!" he said shortly. "You gave me tidings

of that damned traitor, Foulquet. Now learn what he and good Father Pierre of Castelnau have brought upon us."

A murmur echoed round the room. These two priests were well hated in Provence. Count Raymond's face was haggard with anxiety.

"My lords, you all know how Castelnau threatened us with excommunication for sins committed in Provence. What sins? That in our private wars we did not always respect the property of the Church, that we fought on Sundays and on holy days. Yet can we always hold back our men from plunder, and if our enemies attack us on a Sunday, shall we wait with hands crossed upon our breast for his coming?"

His listeners growled. Not one there but understood the net woven about Provence.

"We are reproached in that we have not tortured, exiled, or slain all heretics in our domains. My lords, I should have exterminated a whole people; more, I should have had the hand of every vassal lord against me. You know that, my lord of Foix, whose sister and wife are heretic."

"Ay, sir," answered Foix. "I should fight in their defense."

"As would every man in the kingdom, and Rome knows it," said Raymond passionately. "Yet she bids me loose the hounds of war upon my people, and when I refuse dubs me heretic, and threatens to rob me of my kingdom, and set every man's hand against me. God knows she has succeeded."

He held the letter to Bertrand, from whose lips fell a mighty oath as he read out the insolent manifesto.

"Impious, cruel, and barbarous tyrant! If we could open your heart we should find therein and should ex-

pose the detestable abominations you have committed . . ."

Three pages of reproaches and accusations followed, and the letter ended in this furious denunciation:

"We will take from you the domains you hold from the Church, we will adjure all neighboring princes to fight against you as against the enemy of Jesus Christ, and give them permission to retain all such lands as they wrest from you so that the country shall be no longer infected with heresy under your dominion. . . . The fury of God will not pause there. He shall stretch forth His hand and crush you."

"Par le sang Dieu!" swore Count Philippe, and the others echoed him, fingering their swords. Roger of Béziers looked hard at his uncle.

"Count Bertrand has given you a warning, sir, let these gentlemen hear it."

Raymond waved Bertrand to speech. He stood forward and swept his fierce glance upon them all, then fastened it upon the overlord with a merciless intentness, as if turning the sword of grim truth in the wound of Raymond's indecision.

"My lord count, and gentlemen all, I stood before Philippe Auguste in Paris and heard Foulquet, Bishop of Toulouse—Toulouse, my lords, our capital—implore the king to help Rome in our chastisement. The king would not hear him then, but another stood in the Council, one Simon, Count de Montfort. Ay, sirs, you know him, Rome's ally, a great soldier, too, cruel as hell, yet a man —a very man. And he told me, with meaning, that there are soldiers to fight for Holy Church, and men to lead them."

A murmur ran round the room, but a gleam shot across Bertrand's face.

"I repeat, sir, a great soldier. I thanked him for the compliment he paid Provence, and promised him a willing whetstone."

They laughed fiercely at that, those other southern lords to whom fighting was the keynote of existence."

"But," continued Bertrand, "this does not lessen Foulquet's treachery. He failed in Paris, but at Sens—why, my lord count, and gentlemen all, the very stones of Sens refused to stifle the black shame planned between their walls. For I, being in the castle of Roger of Sens, heard through some hidden opening between my room and the next, what Foulquet, Bishop of Toulouse, offered to Eudes, Duke of Burgundy."

He paused. His great chest heaved with the fury even now rending him at that memory. He bent nearer to Raymond and his blue eyes shot sparks of fire into the eyes of the count.

"Our fair land to be divided among these northern wolves. Ay, my lords of Foix, of Nîmes, of Comminges, all your castles, your lands, your priests, your people, your wives and sisters—why not—given to Burgundy, to Nevers, to St. Pol, to—saints in heaven—to any and all of the men who choose to ask them. And to their soldiers who should achieve such fighting as might ensue——" Here he broke off, swept his eyes round the room, and laughed in a quick terrible manner to hear. "So much Foulquet conceded, that we would fight, therefore the north must bring her fighting men and their reward should be the plunder of our rich cities, the sack of our homesteads, our people's wives to be their slaves, the people's children sold for their profit in Venetian slave-markets. Do you like the tale, my lord!"

He swung back upon Raymond. Beads of moisture stood on the count's face. A deep murmur surged from

his knights, terrible looks passed from man to man. It was well then for Foulquet that he was not within their reach.

"And finally, my lord count," pursued Bertrand, "will you hear what you yourself should lose! Naught less than your whole kingdom, which should be added to the Crown of France."

His vassals burst forth then in their rage. Provence was no more his than theirs to defend. Overlord he was, but each count and knight held himself veritably independent. The absorption into France would mean the loss of this independence. Now, by God's death, he must uphold them in their rights.

Thus they stormed and Raymond nodded, yet plucked his beard as one perplexed, rather than resolved.

"And now listen to what Foulquet asks in return for all these favors," said Bertrand, when the noise had calmed. "A little thing, truly a little, little thing. Only the death of every heretic in Provence, gentlemen. A simple matter to kill nearly an entire population, is it not? Death by the sword, by fire, by horror of siege and sack. Our fair cities laid waste, our beautiful lands blackened by desolation. And the gates of this hell opened upon us by our own bishop, by His Holiness, Bishop Foulquet of Toulouse, Rome's man, blackest traitor on earth since Judas sold the Christ."

He stretched out his great arms as if in answer to their dumb question.

"I asked no better than to kill him then and there, but that would have given Rome another handle against Provence. So I refrained and brought my story to Count Raymond, and to you, my lords. Judge now what it means to Languedoc."

Thus he told his tale and laughed again in that fash-

ion which made his laugh a sob, and turning his back upon them all, stood by the window with unseeing eyes, looking over Rhône's flood, and his great shoulders heaving beneath a passion which for the moment turned his strength to water.

Those southern lords looked from him to each other. They judged and understood and perceived the need for something better than a tempest of useless fulminations. A silence more poignant than words fell upon them, and every eye was bent upon their overlord in an unwavering demand. Trouble sat heavily upon him, anger as well, yet they waited in vain for the assurance which he should have spoken, and at last, goaded beyond all endurance by anxiety, young Roger of Béziers broke upon his reverie.

"Will you pause, uncle? Rome has us in a net, and there is only one way out."

"Fight!" said Bertrand, licking his lips, and "Fight!" shouted the rest.

But the indecision deepened on Raymond's face.

"How shall I fight when already Rome has suborned all the lords of Provence save yourselves? When these priests could not prevail upon them to turn against the heretics, they cast the richer bait of my conquered territory before them. Save yourselves there is not a man in all Provence upon whom I can depend to-day."

It was true, yet still Count Roger, with Bertrand and D'Albret, urged the bolder course.

"Let the renegades go," exclaimed the fiery young Roger, "there remain enough to hold Provence. Fortify the frontier, sir, show the true danger menacing, and the south will rise for you. John of England is your friend, the King of Arragon, also. Otto of Germany keeps France quiet."

But still Raymond plucked his beard.

"Shall I bring the horrors of war upon the country?"

"You would save us from the fires of Rome," said Foix harshly. In his mind's eye he already saw the flames torturing his heretic wife.

Count Philippe approached his master.

"Will you deliver your people to the tender mercy of the Romish wolves, sir? Listen now to what passed at Avallon but ten days since." And he told of the burning of that poor maid. "Now, sir," he concluded, "if the priests will burn a virgin for her chastity, what shall they do to avowed heretics?"

A mighty oath fell from Raymond's lips, the fury of an irresolute man who dare not tread the path he would.

"Let Rome look to herself. I'm no puppet to dance to her piping—I, Raymond of Toulouse."

He threw up his head proudly. A sigh of relief went round the room, and Bertrand thrust the Pope's letter back into his hand.

"Burn it, sir, and bid me carry the ashes to His Holiness," he cried.

But as Raymond's eyes fell again upon the furious denunciation, his exaltation faded.

"Who knows if after all it might not be wiser to yield?" he muttered. "Let me give Rome this proof of my good faith, and surely she will be satisfied. What say you, gentlemen?"

Their silence answered him. He clutched despairingly at his beard.

"Let me sign this treaty, and guarantee the rights that Rome demands! I am not giving up my people thus."

"That will come next," cried his nephew passionately.

Raymond stared at the faces round him. Black dis-

appointment and contempt showed on each, and stung him to fury.

"By God's death, my lords, I am still master in Provence. If I will make terms with Rome, which of you shall deny me?"

No one answered. The Count of Comminges moved to the door. Raymond made a peremptory gesture.

"Where now, sir count?"

"To Comminges, sire, to protect my people."

"And I to Nîmes," said Gaston's father.

"Albi needs me," said the count of that town, and so one by one they passed from the room until only Philippe of Albret, Roger of Béziers and Bertrand of Crein remained with their overlord.

"Will you not go?" he asked with his face all awry.

"Ay, sir, when you are forsworn," replied his nephew affectionately. He loved his uncle, and for all his doubt, felt sure of his ultimate strength. Raymond put his hand on his shoulder.

"God set me in authority, but darkened the road. I cannot see my way. Give you good day, sirs. To-morrow we ride south. Come, Roger, I have need of you."

Philippe and Bertrand bowed low as he went, then the former shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you still think he will fight?"

"H'm!" grunted Bertrand, and no more. He was thinking of those strange words uttered by Mark of Albi, "Woe, woe, woe to him who could save his land, and will not."

"*Par le sang Dieu,*" swore Bertrand of Crein.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW fared the lady of Gervaudan in her new home, the jewel of her beauty set in the almost royal state kept by Count Hubert? Gold and silver dishes on her table, silken sheets upon her bed, robes of satin and shining tissues, precious stones to deck her loveliness, servitors at her call. Song and feast, tourney and dance to fill the summer days, and soft sweet evenings. Fair women and brave men to bear her company. All this she had, and with it a kindly courteous husband, who showered benefits upon her, and never failed by word or deed in his princely deference and respect. It was not long before she came to understand his simple, honorable nature, and to value his esteem. As a friend she would have held him dear enough, as a father . . . Alone in her silk-hung bower, she bent her head upon her hands and smiled with her soul twisted all awry. A curious whim of Fate to set her life for the second time in such a course, to give her again to an old man, who had outlived all thoughts of love. The marriage was purely political, and her husband showed no inclination to regard it in any other light. The union of her fief with his had been completed to satisfy the need of John of England, and Raymond of Toulouse. Having accomplished this, and having secured to his young wife all the state and dignity due to her position, Gervaudan departed on an embassy from Count Raymond to the lords of Roussillon and Cerdagne, of

Conflant, and of Bézalu, vassals of Toulouse, but not too burdened with loyalty. It should be Gervaudan's task to unite them with their overlord against the common danger threatening the country.

Therefore, Rosamunde was left alone with memory and Bertrand's kiss still burning upon her lips. In those first days of her loneliness and sickening sense of his loss, the flame of her pride sank and she forgot her oath. For his kiss had given her a glimpse of the paradise which might have been hers, and had set her on fire with its rapture, so that at times, honor and chastity and faith dwindled into pale wraiths before the swift fire love poured into her veins. And when she tried to pray, behold the face of Yvonne of the Beating Heart danced before her eyes, and the echo of Count Walter's song lilted in her ears:

> Kissed he me! Yea, a thousandfold!
> See, my red lips are not yet cold.

And Bertrand had sung it, and Bertrand had kissed her, and her lips still burnt . . . Oh, Mother of God, Mary, Mother of Love! . . .

She was young, she was beautiful, her love should have crowned her womanhood in its most perfect expression of nobility, but Fate must blast Nature's work, and her puppet heart must wither!

Then came the words of Ermengarde of Ponthieu to torture her:

"In this world there is only one man for one woman, and but one woman for one man . . . their souls cry to each other . . . when they come together their lives must answer the cry, or the meaning of life withers. . . . Thus I chose . . . pray you meet your man in good time to save you from such a choice."

Rosamunde twisted her hands together. There had been no time to pray, for she knew now that she and Bertrand had answered the cry of their souls from that moment when they looked into each other's eyes outside the walls of the Trinity Monastery.

"And if you have to pay, pay as I do, with a laugh."

Ermengarde of Ponthieu had laughed over a husband's dead body. Was Rosamunde of Gervaudan to echo such mirth? But Ponthieu was a brute, and Gervaudan a kindly gentleman, and there were abysses of black shame into which it was not human for a woman's white soul to peer.

She shrank from herself in wholesome horror on the day this understanding came, and thenceforth began to do battle with her pain.

It was not easy. She felt herself the sport of devils, but finding from bitter experience that to confess it increased their malignity tenfold, she tried to face the suggestion, and assert her own divine independence, whereupon, as is the way with all devils when bravely confronted, they retreated for a while.

She would then seize eagerly upon such intervals of peace to interest herself in her home, and to learn the conditions of a new life in a strange country surrounded by new faces. Her grace and beauty made quick friends among these gay, light-hearted southerners, and she tried to force her mind resolutely upon the duties of her state. After a while, pride lifted its head again. She began deliberately to dwell upon Bertrand's arrogance, to lash herself into anger at his conceit which deemed her so easy a prey. He was vile, false, a thief confidently planning to rob his friend. And this thief was sure of her connivance!

The blood burnt her face with anger! If only the

anger had been unmixed with fear! Shame scorched her soul, but the citadel was shaken, or why did regret burst sobbing from her lips? Thus the fight raged, and the devils, beaten back to-day, surged forward on the morrow. Cunningly they twined themselves into memory, brought his eyes to hers, the music of his voice to her ears, showed him to her in his black and yellow bravery, now fighting, now riding beside her through the quiet woods, now frowning and brutal, now tender and smiling—and always the man she loved.

Such an hour came upon her with intolerable force one evening at sundown when she walked with her ladies in the garden. A nightingale poured its flood of melody from a cypress grove, and a pretty woman held up her hand, laughing.

"For whom does he sing?" she cried.

Rosamunde looked at her questioningly.

"Oh, madam," said she, "we have a legend in Provence that the nightingale sings to comfort the loverless maiden."

A ripple of laughter broke upon the scented air.

"He does not sing for me, *Dieu merci,*" said a lovely dame.

"Nor for me, nor for me," echoed the others, and each knew the truth of the boast. Rosamunde, also, knew it. She had not been a month in Provence without learning how high love ruled among its gallant knights and fair ladies. No, the nightingale did not sing for them. The song was for her, who alone had no lover.

She uttered a gracious dismissal, and these gaily dressed butterflies of her court fluttered away, leaving her quite alone. Then she rose and hid herself in the grove of cypress trees with her face all white and drawn, and her beautiful eyes liquid with suffering. Hard, dry

sobs shook her breast. She laid her hands upon it to still its tumult, but the anguish of her heart swept down the barrier of her endeavor, and escaped from her lips in a shrill wail of his name.

"Bertrand!" she cried, and sank upon the ground, and hid her face upon her arm.

As she lay there, Alfor the monk stole noiselessly from behind a tree, and for a second stood gloating over her unconscious figure, then as quickly as he came, retreated into the grove and disappeared.

Thus Rosamunde of Gervaudan did battle with herself, and at the end of the month her husband returned to take her to the palace of St. Gilles, where Count Raymond held his summer court. They set out with a vast and very magnificent retinue, and so she went forth to discover how far such victory as she had thought to win should stand before the living presence of Bertrand of Crein, to pit her pride and her oath against his love—rather, heaven help her, against her own.

To St. Gilles, also, went Alfor, that sharp tool of Rome, but in secret. Little did Rosamunde dream that her own chaplain at Gervaudan had sheltered this emissary from Cîteaux, had helped him to spy upon his lady. So far, however, nothing had rewarded his pains until that moment of her abandon in the grove. Now he hastened in her steps to Raymond's court, a black, foul serpent waiting to strike his unsuspecting prey.

CHAPTER XXIV

RAYMOND had sent messengers to Vallance, where Father Pierre bided. *Quos Deus vult perdere* . . . He had yielded to Rome's demand for peace upon the Rhône, and now waited at St. Gilles whither Pierre should also come to accept his pledge, and raise the interdict which had been laid upon the country.

Wise men shook their heads, and set about putting their castles in order. They scented trouble from afar. Angry men talked violently of treason; timid men trembled. All shuddered for the peril which threatened their homes.

Yet this peril had so far taken no actual substance, and there were many who shut their eyes to danger, and lived but for the joy of the hour.

Never had the sky been fairer, the sun brighter than in this last summer of Languedoc's glory. Never had Raymond's court glistened with greater splendor than now when already the days of its brilliance were numbered. Like the last effort of an expiring flame, it soared aloof in one final blaze of golden effulgence ere dying forever in the blackened embers of an accomplished destiny.

In Provence every lord of any importance lived as a prince. The land was filled with as many courts as castles. The Count of Toulouse kept royal state at St. Gilles with the greatest of his vassals serving in the

household. Such were the Chief Constable, one Rostaing de Sabraon, having domains above and below the Rhône, Pierre of Fulcodi, the Chancellor; the Marquis of Venaissin, who held the Great Seal, and the Lord of Audiguier, Master of the Horse.

These and many others, with the chaplains, the notaries, and the soldiers of the bodyguard went to complete Count Raymond's household, while the very flower of Provençal chivalry adorned his court.

There, too, came the troubadours, to sing the graces of the ladies and the prowess of the men. Some of noble birth, many of lowly, but all equal by virtue of their own chivalry and heroism.

Fair choice of ladies had they to serve. The young Countess of Toulouse, sister of the King of Arragon, glowed with the soft splendor of Spain's beauty. Ermengarde, Countess of Narbonne, was the toast of Provence. The Lady of Foix's blue eyes and ruddy locks were the despair of more than one gallant. Many others gemmed the court with their loveliness, and to complete the bevy, most said to crown it, came the Countess of Gervaudan with her pale, perfect face and dark haunting eyes.

Among the elder women, Adelaide, Viscountess of Béziers and mother to young Roger, held chief place, being own sister to the Count of Toulouse. Beauty still clung to her, although twenty years and more had passed since Arnaud de Marveil, *le grand maître d'amour*, had found his way to her husband's court at Béziers, had loved her, sung her praises, gained his reward, and finally tasted all the bitterness of jealousy when Adelaide drove him from her to please the King of Castile.

A kiss to-day, to-morrow a tear, but on the day after a new kiss to dry the grief. Oh, Love ruled high in

Provence, and it were a pity to weep when life was short. So thought these merry lords and ladies of the south, and while Pierre of Castelnau tarried in his coming, they passed the time in feast and dance, in tourney and in song.

The luxury was unbridled, the extravagance held poor men breathless. Who had ever rivalled the feast given by the Count of Narbonne to Raymond, when four hundred knights and their ladies were entertained for three days amid the glitter of silver and gold, the flash of jewels, the sheen of silk and satin? Soft music to soothe the heart, shrill trumpets to stir the blood, a court of beauty with the newly wed Lady of Gervaudan crowned its queen, a gallant tourney where all were invited, where the bourgeois might unseat a belted knight amid roars of applause led by Raymond himself, and where undoubtedly Count Bertrand of Crein proved himself the most valorous of all that goodly assembly of gallant men, and knelt to receive his reward from the fair fingers of the Queen of Beauty herself.

Nor did the marvel end there. What was money to Aymeric of Narbonne? He had a superiority to prove over my lords of Montpellier, of Foix, of Comminges, of Albi—over all Provence. Even Raymond VI. gasped at that bonfire of wax set blazing in his honor, for the precious stuff was almost worth its weight in gold. Who could hope to rival such magnificence? But the culminating miracle was yet to come in the shower of gold money tossed among the crowd, and the deliberate slaughter of thirty of the most valuable horses in Narbonne's stables. A true insight into the medieval contrasts of luxury and barbarism does that slaughter afford.

But the gay hours were all unconsciously drawing to a swift conclusion. Messengers brought news of Father

Castelnau's arrival for the morrow, and though the joyous crowd little dreamed it, this was to be the last of the sunny days.

A gala had been arranged. In the cool of the afternoon as it drew near sunset, the beautiful Countess of Narbonne should preside over a Court of Love, a feast was to follow, and the evening to close in a flare of light with the famous *Danse à la Torche.*

Such the program, but the evening was to close in a greater blaze than that of the dancers' torches—even in the beginning of a conflagration which should be as the fires of hell set loose on earth, and of which no man could prophesy the end.

CHAPTER XXV

A WHITE palace cut like a gigantic pearl against a sky so deeply blue that the color seemed to take substance, and resolve itself into a cloud of quivering azure—marble terraces shining upon green lawns, splashes of color where flowers rioted in a wanton profusion born of the sunny climate—patches of more sombre green where groups of trees offered retreats of delicious shade from the ardent sun—a silver stream interlacing and entwining the gardens—such was the setting of the fantasia. Behold it peopled! See the troubadour sitting upon the marble steps, drawing music from his viol to please the ears of two fair ladies leaning upon the balustrade above. His tunic of orange satin and mantle of purple velvet broke richly upon the white stone. One lady wore a dress of deep sea green silk, cut low at the bosom and with rucked sleeves tapering to a point almost above her fingers. A gold chain girdled her hips, and from it hung her jewelled *aumonière*.[1] A gold fillet bound her brow and held the blue veil which floated over her ruddy hair. The other was garbed in the same fashion, but had chosen the color of the heart of a deep pink rose, and her black hair flowed loosely upon her shoulders from beneath a flat velvet cap. A rare beauty she had of delicate aquiline features

[1] Alms-bag. A recently introduced fashion of carrying money for distribution among the poor. Subsequently the bag was regarded as an important adjunct to the toilette, irrespective of its original pious use.

and dark almond-shaped eyes, legacies of some Jewish or Saracen ancestor. There was scarcely a family in Provence who could not find one such in its genealogical tree. Eudes of Aquitaine, the adversary of Charles Martel, had given his own daughter in marriage to a Saracen emir.

The group was only one of many peopling the stately garden with grace and color. Song and laughter echoed among the trees. Servants moved here and there bearing silver trenchers piled high with fruit, and golden beakers overflowing with foaming sherbert. Little dark-skinned Arab boys held the ladies' trains. The greater the lady the more gaudy the apparel of her boy, the rarer the jewel flashing from his snowy turban.

Glitter of sunshine, dying now in purple and yellow glory, glitter of gold, of luxury, of beauty. Wanton waste of Nature in the wealth of tree and shrub and flower glowing in unbounded profusion, wanton prodigality of splendor in the richest court of Christendom.

Rosamunde of Gervaudan looked upon her surroundings with curious eyes. Here was the warmth and magnificence so often described by Bertrand. Here, too, the women, goddesses by the will of men, walking like queens in the consciousness of their power. "In Provence women are held divine," said Bertrand. Already she had seen the worship of that divinity, pure enough in its ideal conception, but too easily submerged in human frailty. Was she not wearied by the conflict in herself? For Bertrand had kept his word, and this last month at St. Gilles had been passed in a silent duel between his persistency and her resistance. And she hated him when he smiled, and hated herself more because she could not meet his laughing eyes.

A sudden movement throughout the garden scattered

her thoughts, and a page ran up to beg her join the procession now issuing from the palace. It trailed its multicolored beauty across the marble terraces, down the gleaming steps, and over the emerald grass to a sylvan dell set in a cypress grove. A raised marble seat stood at the farther opening of this glade, and on either side were lower seats arranged in a semicircle. Knights and ladies in every hue of the rainbow, with nodding plumes and iridescent jewels, followed the lovely Countess of Narbonne to her marble throne, from whence as the Queen of this Court of Love, she should issue decrees and regulate disputes.

Her dress was silver tissue garlanded with roses, a wreath of roses crowned her raven hair, and in her hand she carried a silver scepter bearing an ivory cupid. With smiling eyes she looked upon her Court. The ladies sat on her right hand, the knights upon her left. A fountain played in a marble basin in the grassy space between. Peacocks flaunted their green and blue and gold sheen against bushes of crimson and yellow and pink roses. The trees arched over the lower opening of the glade, and framed the white beauty of the palace against the purple and rosy glory of the sunset. Such was the setting of this Court of Love in the grounds of Count Raymond's summer palace of St. Gilles.

The proceedings opened with a song given sweetly enough by a young minstrel-knight. More than one pair of bright eyes smiled approval upon his lithe form and handsome face as he stood before the company, and that woman was held lucky to whom he had devoted his *domnei*.[1] The Queen thanked him graciously, then rose upon her marble daïs to address the court.

[1] Chivalrous service of pen and sword. Pen to write her perfections, sword to maintain them against dispute.

"Greetings to you, noble ladies, and greetings to you, noble knights. We welcome you heartily to this our parliament of loving hearts. Most noble, you have, with great condescension, elected me to be your Queen, and in accepting the crown, here I lay aside all consciousness of Ermengarde of Narbonne, and become the mouthpiece of the law. What law?"

She raised the scepter on high. Immediately every man and every woman, with the exception of Rosamunde, rose to their feet.

"Amor!" they cried. "Amor!"

"Whoso appeals to Love by Love shall be judged," said the Queen.

"Agreed!"

"The decrees of the Court cannot be questioned."

"Agreed!"

Then they resumed their seats. The Queen turned with winning graciousness to Rosamunde.

"We welcome you among us, Lady of Gervaudan. Such beauty and such grace enhance our circle like two priceless jewels, or," she paused, glancing to right and left to mark the effect of her words, "or better still, let me liken your virtues and your beauty to the fairest and most fragrant flower that blooms, and name you the sweetest rose of all in the chaplet which crowns my brow. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Rosamunde, Rose of the World."

Once again all sprang up, laughing and clapping their hands. Rosamunde rose also, confused, and as she stood there, pages suddenly appeared carrying baskets of roses, into which the knights and ladies plunged their hands, and seizing the blossoms cast them at her feet as one by one they passed her. Rose petals clung to her hair, upon her white breast and upon the folds of her white satin

"A page ran up to beg her join the procession"

gown. Her feet trod upon the pink and crimson and yellow beauties. They were piled up before her like some votive offering to a goddess, and while she stood bewildered, a lovely color flushing her face into a most wonderful beauty, Count Bertrand of Crein, coming last of the throng, knelt before her, and stretching up his arm over the flowers, tendered her three more—three glowing crimson roses, perfect in form and color, growing on one stalk.

"Roses of Crein," he murmured. "Will you take them, Rose of the World?"

She looked down upon him. His eyes kissed her. A mist swam before her own. Pride was forgotten. She loved him . . .

Mechanically she took the roses, and shook to feel the touch of his hand. Never doubt that he marked her state. Triumphant, he sprang to his feet, and gave place to Count Philippe, who should lead her before the throne, there to make her obeisance.

She curtsied low amid *"Vivas"* which made the glade ring, then returned to her seat, and laid the crimson roses upon her knees. Blood-red they splashed against the white satin. Roses of Crein, red rose of war, red rose of love, red rose of a man's desire for all he meant to have!

Her initiation being accomplished, now came the business of the court. The Queen raised her scepter. A young boy clad in green and gold who stood behind her throne gently clapped his silver cymbals. At the signal, the lady who sat upon the Queen's immediate right rose, and moving before the throne, sank to the ground in a deep curtsy. It was the rose-clad dame who had listened to the troubadour's song, Countess of Gisor, one of the greatest beauties at Raymond's court.

"I ask knowledge for a friend," she began, and no one smiled. "Your Majesty, a kiss was stolen by force. The outrage yet stings. What salve can a helpless lady apply to such a hurt?"

"Has she no champion for her need?"

"Doubtless, but she is aflame with desire to deal the punishment herself."

The Queen looked round upon the knights.

"You hear, my lords. Can one of you propose some means of redress to a most grievously wronged lady?"

Then a knight rose, and advancing to the throne bowed deeply. He was a handsome man, gorgeously attired in a dark blue satin tunic with a deep border of gold and silver worked round the edge. His brown beard was clipped short and his hair curled thickly beneath his blue and silver cap with its sweeping rose-pink plume.

"Your Grace, may I suggest a remedy?" he asked.

The Queen smiled. The Lady of Gisor waited with downcast eyes. The knight half turned so that all should hear his words.

"A kiss, like the lance of Achilles, is alone capable of healing the wounds it has caused."

A ripple of laughter followed. The Queen leaned forward.

"The Court has heard. Is the verdict registered?"

Without dissent. She addressed the beautiful applicant.

"You appealed to the Court, the Court has answered you. Go in peace."

The knight put forth his hand, the countess laid her fingers upon it, and he led her to her seat.

"Will you accept the salve?" he whispered.

"You shall be my partner in the dance," she mur-

mured, an inconsequent reply which yet seemed to satisfy him.

The cymbals rang again. According to rule, a knight stepped forward this time with his plaint.

"The fair queen, Eleanour of Guyenne, has declared that true love cannot exist between husband and wife."

Lady Rosamunde stiffened in her seat at the unhallowed statement, but worse was to follow.

The knight continued. "But, O Queen, may a husband, divorced by his wife, become her lover when she has married again?"

All expectant, the Court looked at its lovely Queen. She, leaning a white arm upon the side of her chair, rested her chin upon the pink cup of her palm, and pondered the question.

"A deep matter, my lord," she said at last. "If he suffered the pangs of love in punishment for that wrong which divorced him from her, herein would justice be satisfied."

"But how far should mercy temper justice?" pursued the knight.

"Why, sir, so far as the lady's mercy should incline her."

"And if she listened to his prayer?"

The Queen drew one long raven curl across her crimson lips, then let it drop upon the snow of her bosom. Her voice sang rather than spoke the answer.

"It would be sweet charity to forgive his former sin. Does not heaven adjure us to pardon our enemies?"

"Then, madam, her authority for such forgiveness becomes divine, and therefore blessed."

"Beyond doubt. She obeys the heavenly precept, and the order of our Court. Ladies and gentlemen, will you repeat the law!"

As before, all rose to their feet, and with one voice proclaimed, "Love one another." When the echo died away, they resumed their seats, and the knight was dismissed with the usual formula, "Go in peace."

It was all done so simply and so naturally. In blasphemous distortion of divine precepts to authorize a flagrant sin, these gay voluptuaries perceiving neither blasphemy nor sin, would have gaped astonished by any suggestion of either.[1] Poor Rosamunde felt her senses in a whirl. Love justified all things! Love made vice a virtue! In such a moral atmosphere had Bertrand been born and bred. Dangerous comprehension dawned within her dimming resentment. Almost she had it in her heart to forgive.

The cymbals again. Her pale face flushed as Bertrand himself stepped into the circle. He made a gallant figure in his black and yellow splendor with the three crimson roses flaunting on his breast, and her ducat swaying lightly over his heart. There were other men present who had greater claims to beauty, but not one to touch the strength and vigor of his frame or the fierce bright glance of his blue eyes, and the forcefulness of his rugged face. So, at least, thought one woman, who after a quick look, veiled her eyes, and sat in motionless constraint listening to the music of his voice. He made his bow to the Queen, and she returned it with her sweetest smile, for Bertrand of Crein might have touched the heart of this great lady herself had he so willed. At

[1] The position of women in the south favored irregular attachments to the prejudice of legitimate affection. They were allowed to hold fiefs and in the case of such heiresses, marriages were nearly always decided to suit political convenience. Hence the many ill-assorted unions, frequent divorces and a swiftly born custom of considering love as independent of marriage.

least, so ran the gossip, and named others as fair who would have looked kindly upon him at his bidding. Now when he stood forth, harp in hand, to sing his song, more than one soft cheek flushed, and the Queen's eyes gleamed beneath the shadow of her hand. But Lady Rosamunde of Gervaudan sat cold and white, praying that none might mark the tumult of her breast as Bertrand struck a chord and the music sank into the silver splash of the fountain.

"Will you listen to a song of those two fair divinities worshipped by all poor troubadours, of Love who inflames their hearts, of Grace who inclines beauty to listen to their prayers?"

Ermengarde bent her stately head.

"The Court is all impatient to hear its sweetest singer, Count Bertrand."

He struck another chord and flashed a merry look upon the assembly. In spite of herself Rosamunde lifted her eyes and met his smile. He, greatly daring, held her look, then sent it back all quivering with his love, and began his song.

"Love did me wrong, when lodging in my heart,
Since Grace refused to smile upon Love's need,
And wounded, she must now from me depart,
Leaving my heart unsuccored still to bleed.

Vainglorious Love! Wouldst ruin my delight?
Ah, Goddess, taste for once the sweeter glow
Of triumph yielded to fair Grace's might,
And let her blessings cool my fevered brow.

Love, let me win at last a gage from thee,
How would thy glory suffer in my gain?
Let Grace, this once, bring solace unto me,
And ease the cruel torment of my pain.

Can Love and Grace in peace then ne'er accord?
Cannot this miracle for me be wrought?
Love, on her knees to Grace, here prays the word
For which my sighs and tears in vain have sought.

I only ask the liberty to breathe
Into her ear the love with which I die;
I only ask around Love's form to wreathe
The arms of Grace and catch their mingled sigh.

Oh, Love and Grace, join hands and take my part,
Sweet Goddesses, unite and melt her heart."

The music of voice and harp died away. For a moment his audience sat silent beneath the spell of the power and passion which had deepened the beautiful tenor notes, then a storm of applause rang out, and the Queen, stepping from her throne, lifted the wreath of roses from her head and laid it upon his.

"Thus we crown you King of Song," she smiled. "Rest content, sir count. No woman's heart could remain obdurate to such a prayer. I speak as a woman."

"St. Julian bless the hope your Majesty inspires," quoth he, with never a glance at Rosamunde, who had heard it all.

Ermengarde gave him her hand.

"The sun has set and supper waits for us in the castle. My lords and ladies, we thank you for your pleasant company. Love's labor is over, now begins the joy of feast and dance. Count Bertrand, by your leave."

Hand in hand they passed down the glade, followed by all the train. The Lady of Gervaudan came last, escorted by Count Philippe, who little dreamed of the jealous fury raging in her breast as she marked the Lady Ermengarde's soft glances, and Bertrand's head bent down to catch her speech.

She had repulsed his love, and that was right and

proper. But for him to prefer another woman before her! That was wrong, most villainously wrong.

Very deliberately she threw down the roses of Crein, very deliberately walked over them, stamping out their loveliness.

But in the privacy of her own apartment she fell upon her knees, and prayed heaven to deliver her from the temptation of this love, whose strength she had never known before, nor feared so much as now when jealousy found her soul writhing in love's talons.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE feast was over, and on the lawn beneath the palace windows knights and ladies trod a stately measure, known as *La Danse au Chapelet,* from the flower wreath worn by each lady, and which at the end of the dance she would give to her partner, receiving for the gift—a kiss.

The Countess of Toulouse danced with Narbonne, her husband with the Lady Ermengarde. The Countess of Gisor gave her hand to him who had prescribed the remedy for her woe, and Rosamunde had found no escape from Bertrand. Count Hubert himself had forced the dance upon her, and she could not prolong an unreasonable excuse before all the court. So Bertrand led her out and guided her steps through the unfamiliar movements. Scarcely speaking, not even smiling, and she not looking at him did not perceive the ugly set of his face. The *finale* of the dance came as a surprise, and when he knelt before her to receive the garland, she did not know what to do.

"Take off your wreath and crown me with it," he said.

She glanced about her, saw the other men crowned, and lifted the flowers from her hair.

"I give you the custom but no crown," she said, her breath coming too quickly.

Bertrand caught the wreath on his arm, and sprang up laughing excitedly.

"A niggard lady, yet I will pay in full," he answered, and took her and kissed her on the lips. Then holding her tightly he cast a swift glance about him, and seeing every man preoccupied with the same sweet charity, made haste to draw her unperceived into the shadow of a little arbor hidden among the trees. There he clasped her to his breast, and kissed her lips, her eyes, her hair, her throat, bruised her with his lips, scorched her with their fire, while she lay helpless in his arms, her eyes closed, and received the storm of his passion into the storm of her own fierce rapture.

Where was her oath, where her pride, her struggle? Burnt into nothingness in the flame of her love as it rushed to meet his, burnt from memory in the living fire of their passion. Primitive man, primitive woman, they clung to each other, drawing soul to soul in that long kiss, until she lay against his breast, faint with a joy too poignant for her strength.

Then Bertrand, shaking to feel her so in his arms, moved his lips a little from hers, and kissed her name upon her perfect mouth.

"Rosamunde! *Ma mie, ma mie.*"

She stirred in his arms, and sighed.

"Rose of the World! Rose of my world!" His lips sank on to hers again, and he kissed her from that sweet faintness into warm, throbbing life. Still the madness held them. On the lawn beyond, men and women with lighted torches in their hands danced the celebrated *Danse de la Torche.* The glare intensified the surrounding darkness so that these two were doubly hidden from prying eyes even had there been any to discover them. But the dance held every mind, and none came to break upon their sweet solitude in the scented summer night. Only a bush at the arbor's entrance seemed to

take on a darker shadow, and its leaves rustled now and again, although the air was still. Yet not so loudly as to disturb the two within.

They, standing in the heart of the arbor, could not be seen, could scarcely see each other's faces. What need of eyes when love's message beat upon the mouth?

Hark, a voice singing in the wood!

> "Kissed he me! Yea, thousandfold,
> See, my red lips are not yet cold."

The words fell upon Rosamunde's heart throbbing so wildly under Bertrand's hand. With a sudden quickening from the torpor of her abandon into a recklessness of despair, she wreathed her arms round his neck and burnt her kiss upon his.

She felt him quiver, felt his arms tighten, suffocated in his grasp, and longed wildly to die then at his hands, to die upon his breast. Slowly and painfully her numbed brain was beginning to work again. Memory's pale face gleamed beneath the rushing waters which were sweeping her away. This then was the end of her battle . . . a straw whirled helplessly by the torrent. . . .

And now he was speaking in low, fierce accents, which vibrated with his triumph, pouring the fever of his love into her ears, his queen, his life, his love, his very God. He knelt before her, clasping her waist, and prayed her to wipe her little feet upon him; he kissed her feet, her hands, then up again he took her in his arms, and rained his kisses on her face.

And while her heart suffered him gladly, her soul was denying him, while she pressed close to him, and clung to him with all her force, she knew herself being drawn from him by a strength greater than her own desire. She could not define the feeling, she could only realize with-

out understanding that an invisible barrier had arisen in her innermost soul to divide them. Her barrier, not his. Here lay his love captive in his hand. No longer an empty vaunt that third rose of Crein, but a red glowing flower full blown for him to cull. He was drunk with his love and his pride. *"Je maintiens,"* he whispered in his arrogance. "Did I not swear to hold my own?" Fierce, hot words in her ear, fierce, hot kisses on her lips. "Mine!" he muttered, "all mine."

She held her hands against his breast, and bent stiffly from him.

"No," she said.

He laughed. This was the way of all women; but when she resisted him, and when by strength he caught her lips again and found them cold, he grew first perplexed, then angry. And he was dangerously aflame.

"Now, by Allah!" he swore, and buried his face in the whiteness of her bosom.

Something snapped in her being. Once again she saw Ponthieu's brutal face bent over the helpless Blanche of Arroy, saw the face of Charles, the huntsman, saw her own husband's face, caught a glimpse of something better than a love based upon treachery and shame.

"Bertrand," she whispered, "you saved me from Rodolphe of Verlay."

Her meaning fell like snow upon his fever. He lifted his head, but his hands still bruised her arms.

"But you love me," he stammered.

"Yes," she said.

"Yet will liken me to Verlay?"

"Yes," she said again.

The truth stung him to fury. "Your love is a trick and a lie," he cried.

She trembled in his clasp. "Ah, no. Mary help me."

"Then you are a coward."

"No," she said again, "not that."

"Then, by God's death, why——"

"Honor!' she gasped, "faith! Be merciful—we shall thank heaven all our lives." Her voice broke piteously, and Bertrand laughed.

"I'm in no mood for mercy," said he brutally, "and I want no favor from heaven—only yours."

Her little cry was smothered against his breast. The shadow by the bush outside moved, came stumbling into the arbor . . . From the palace beyond the lawn men's voices arose in shouts—"Bertrand of Crein! Where is Bertrand of Crein? His Highness desires him in the council hall. Crein, Albi, Comminges, where are the lords for Count Raymond's need?"

The dance stopped in confusion, men hurried hither and thither, lights came flaming toward the arbor. Bertrand loosed Rosamunde, and, turning, jostled against a figure in the darkness, seized it, and dragged it outside.

His captive struggled furiously, but Bertrand proved the better man, and they stumbled together into the flare of the torches. Now Bertrand was beside himself with a fury born of loosened passions, and doubly infuriated that a spy had been at his heels. When the light revealed a monk's robe and a monk's cowl in his hands, he gave his prisoner a shake which set the teeth rattling in his head, and tore the hood back from his face.

"Alfor the monk, *par Dieu!*" he cried. "You hound, is the lesson not learnt yet?"

And he dealt him a blow which sent the monk crashing to the ground. As he fell, a knife flew from his hand and lay at Bertrand's feet.

Men came running up at the sight, foremost among them Hubert of Gervaudan and Count Philippe, with Gaston the page at their heels.

"What's to do?" cried Gervaudan. "Hi, Bertrand, did you not hear the summons? His Highness needs us in the council room."

"Ay," said Bertrand fiercely, "I was coming when this foul monk set upon me."

"For which one man at least should give thanks," said a thick voice, and there was Alfor on his knees wiping the blood from his lurid face, his eyes burning with many lusts, but chiefly with jealous hatred black as hell.

"Look in the arbor, Hubert of Gervaudan, and you shall find your honor shredded upon its rose-thorns, ah——" His voice gurgled in his throat as Bertrand gripped him and would have choked the life out of him. But Hubert of Gervaudan thrust Bertrand of Crein aside, and laid his own clutch upon Alfor's arm.

"Give way," said he very quietly. "Who made my honor yours to avenge?"

And while these two men who had been friends stared at each other, Count Philippe averted his eyes, and the little crowd moved uneasily; but Alfor the monk laughed very evilly, and Gaston the page slipped away unperceived into the darkness towards the arbor which lay some twenty feet behind the circle of light cast by the torches.

Then Hubert of Gervaudan spoke.

"Private quarrels must wait. This is no time to kill a priest with Father Castelnau waiting in the council hall, and our master's great need upon us." He beckoned two young esquires forward, and delivered Alfor into their charge. "Guard him safely to the palace," he said, "and we will follow."

But Bertrand, perceiving his intention to go to the arbor, and not knowing whether Rosamunde had escaped, placed himself as it were unheedingly in the path.

"My quarrel with this dog comes before yours, Hubert. Go you to the palace, while I take him to safe custody, and tell His Highness that I am coming." He had regained his self-control, and his brain worked quickly to shield Rosamunde. He spoke so naturally that Gervaudan hesitated, having indeed no justification for the suspicion roused by Alfor's words. And all might have gone well, but for the monk's black tongue.

"*Tout est commun entre amis,*" he jeered, "not excepting the roses of their gardens."

"Now damn your scurrilous tongue!" said Philippe of Albret and struck him full in the mouth. He uttered a snarl, put forth all his strength, and twisted himself free. At the same moment came men from the palace, headed by the chief constable himself, and in the confusion of his arrival, Alfor eluded Philippe's clutch and dashed off into the darkness.

Some of the younger knights started in pursuit, but Count Rostaing's voice of thunder as hurriedly checked them.

"What does this mean, my lords?" he demanded furiously. "Shall His Highness wait all night upon your pleasure, and must I, Rostaing de Sabraon, be sent forth like a beggarly schoolmaster to whip your lordships into school? Your humble servant, sirs. Will it please your mightinesses to follow my unworthy self!"

Alfor had escaped, and they could not explain without lighting gossip's flame about Rosamunde. There was nothing for it but to accompany the wrathful constable.

Yet Bertrand hesitated. He did not like to think of Rosamunde alone and unprotected, but to return to the

arbor meant setting a seal upon Hubert's suspicions. Of the two evils the lesser seemed to go on to the palace. Yet again Alfor was at large in the gardens. If only he had some one to protect her! Gaston! Where was the boy?

His searching eyes met those of Gervaudan, who had not moved with the others.

"What do you seek, Bertrand?" asked he, very quiet.

Bertrand, looking beyond him, saw a woman and a boy slip across the dim zone of light cast by the torches, and disappear among the trees. He turned with a sigh of relief and, not answering Hubert, sped toward the palace. The latter stared after him, frowned, then, swinging on his heel, walked quickly toward the arbor.

Meanwhile Rosamunde and Gaston were making what haste they might among the leafy groves.

"This way, madam," whispered Gaston. "If we keep to the path we shall come by the back of the palace."

Rosamunde did not answer. Shame and fear abased her soul in the presence of this boy. She, Rosamunde of Gervaudan, to be saved by a page, and sneak into safety by the back paths of concealment! How should she meet the frank, boyish eyes again?

Gaston, however, took quite another view. When they gained the terrace unperceived, he sank to his knees, and looked up into her face with eager eyes.

"Oh, most gracious lady," said he, "have I served you well?"

"None could have served me better," she answered sadly.

"Then praise be to our Lady of Love, who has answered my prayer. For see you, lady, I am being trained in war and all manly endurance, but never yet have I been so blessed as to help a lady in distress. And what can a

man ask better than to live and die in such divine service!"

He kissed her hand, and rose again all aglow with his delight, yet shy after the manner of boys when their deepest feelings are stirred.

"We ride to Crein to-night, but first I would have you know that—that"—he stammered, and blushed, then the words came in a rush—"I would die to serve you for your own sake, lady, not only because my master loves you and you him."

Rosamunde drew away. "Hush, boy, hush! Never utter such madness," she said, sick at heart for the madness that had been.

"Why not?" asked Gaston simply. "Your husband is an old man, and you and Count Bertrand are young, and, moreover, you loved long ago——"

She laid her hand upon his lips. "Go, boy, you torture me."

A step on the terrace behind them—the Count of Gervaudan with a pearl-wrought velvet bag in his hand. He signed to Gaston to go and when the boy reluctantly obeyed, turned a grave, stern face upon his wife.

"I found your *aumonière* in the arbor," he said.

Her own face whitened, but she met his eyes bravely.

"Your name is on every lip. My honor is shredded upon thorns."

"It is not true," said Rosamunde baldly.

"Men have killed their wives for less."

"For so much and no more you may kill me."

He passed his hand over his brows. In that moment he looked very old and broken.

"My friend and my wife," he muttered. "I have been a fool——"

She laid her hands upon his arm and forced him to meet her eyes, sad enough but quiet.

"It is not true, Hubert. Thank God, it is not true."

He suffered her touch on his arm, but his right hand plucked at the dagger on his breast.

"It might have been," he said hoarsely. "The truth, my lady, the truth."

She smiled, fearing life so much more than death, and bowed her head.

"*Par la poitrine de Dieu!* Then why——?"

"I love him too much," said Rosamunde.

His hand fell from the dagger. Doubt and wonder struggled in his eyes.

"Will you have me believe that? And what of him?"

Silence held her. She could not answer for Bertrand.

Gervaudan gave a short laugh. "I am almost minded to believe you, my lady, but Crein ever loved *par amors*. He must answer to me. Now go to your rooms. I have stayed too long from the council hall. You and I will talk of this again."

She felt suddenly very small and weak and mean before this man.

"No traitor in deed, but traitor in thought," she said unsteadily. "I thank you for such forbearance."

"I thank you for such honesty," he returned quietly. "Give you good-night, my lady of Gervaudan."

When she had gone he wiped the sweat of iron self-restraint from his forehead.

"So much for a woman," he muttered. "Now for man's work among men."

CHAPTER XXVII

PIERRE OF CASTELNAU had arrived before his time and not in peace. Rumors of fresh trouble spread from mouth to mouth. Rome refused Count Raymond's submission, demanded new concessions. Messengers hurried to and fro summoning the councillors to the hall where Raymond sat on his throne with Rostaing of Sabraon at his right hand, and Pierre Fulcodi, his chancellor, at his left. There, too, were the Marquis of Venaissin, the lord of Audiguier, and the other great lords of the household. Roger of Béziers stood on the lower step of the throne, while all round surged the vassals, high and low, of Provence.

The Counts of Foix, of Albi, of Comminges, of Narbonne and of Carcassonne, of Nimes and of Beaucairè, and others, too many to be named, each with his esquires and knights and pages, helped to swell the throng. Count Philippe stood shoulder to shoulder with Hubert of Gervaudan, and foremost in the ranks of the expectant crowd loomed Bertrand of Crein's dominant face and towering figure.

And in the center of this formidable ring, one man alone, in the monkish black and white garb of Citeaux, with the cowl thrown back from his bald head, and his eyes burning fiercely upon Count Raymond of Toulouse, Pierre of Castelnau, papal legate come into the enemy's stronghold to rend forever the veil of pretense, and to

light the torch of fire and blood which should wipe out an entire civilization.

In flaming words he accused Raymond of bad faith. "Not one promise," said he, "have you fulfilled, nor punished one evil-doer. False son of the Church, apostate, coward——"

A shout drowned his words. Raymond started from his throne, holding up his hand for silence, and men obeyed, perceiving gladly the fury of his face, not understanding that he had slipped Prudence from the leash in the very moment when she would have served him best.

"Par la poitrine de Dieu!" he thundered, "will you give me shame before my whole court?"

"Before the whole world," returned Castelnau undaunted.

Raymond gripped the arms of his chair. He could scarcely speak for the fury consuming him.

"Liar!" he articulated, "thief who serves a thief! Oh God, it is too much! Heretic I am not, but a faithful son of the Church. You know it, Rome knows it. Have I not obeyed her in all save the massacre of my people? Have I not laid down my arms at her bidding, seen my vassals rise in disobedience to the edict of peace! Did she not swear to raise the interdict even by your hand? But she has marked me for destruction, and her promises are lies, and you her foul mouthpiece——" He tore his beard in his fury, plucked at his velvet mantle, then, leaping suddenly to his feet, gave vent to the resentment so long controlled, in a torrent of abuse and invective.

Scarlet burned the legate's usually pale face, black his cavernous eyes. The barriers were down now. The mutual hatred of prince and priest rushed forth unchained, met and mingled in one hellish flood, surged round both, caught them upon its waters and swept

both to destruction. For when Raymond's fury ceased, breathless, Pierre of Castelnau in the transport of his frenzy seized the only weapon left to his revenge.

"Know now, sir count," he screamed, "I denounce you as disloyal and forsworn! I excommunicate you, and I lay the curse of interdict upon your fiefs! From this moment, you are the enemy of God and man. Your subjects are released from the oath of allegiance. Whosoever despoils you will do right"—he paused and glared round upon the heaving assembly, then swung back upon Raymond; his voice took on a deeper note—"and whosoever slays you shall be blessed."

A growl, a shout, a hurricane of cries, and those lords of Provence were upon him as wolves upon a goat. Bertrand of Crein had got him, Comminges struck his mouth, fifty hands fought each other to get at him when high over the din sounded Raymond's voice commanding order. Little did his maddened followers heed him, and it needed his own presence aided by Sabraon and Gervaudan to wrest the bleeding legate from the men who would have slain him. Then Father Pierre sank nearly senseless at the foot of the throne, and Raymond looked down upon him, standing between him and those who sought to tear him to pieces.

The count's chest heaved with the passions roused by the legate's infamous denunciation; yet in the very center of their vortex he had been able to glimpse what Pierre's murder would bring upon the country, and by a superhuman effort he sacrificed personal revenge to Languedoc's need. Now that the first lust to punish was over, even anger began to subside. In a short while he regained the composure habitual to him, and, moreover, succeeded in holding his Provençal wolves in leash.

"Let him go!" he said contemptuously, "and carry else-

where his impotent rage. The lion disdains the fox. Are there not enough dogs to rid the country of his presence?"

A murmur swelled through the hall. Men looked from Raymond's dignified figure to each other, and smiled, well content. No sign of cringing here, no submission to Rome's insolence—but a great sovereign assured of his integrity, and willing to prove himself in the face of all Christendom, to defend his rights in the jaws of hell itself. This was the prince they knew and would follow to the death.

A man tossed his cap into the air and shouted, "Vive Provence!" In a moment the air was thick with caps, the hall filled with deafening shouts, "Vive Raymond VI.! Vive Toulouse! Vive Provence! Liberty and faith. Down with the tonsures!"

They surged about Raymond, knelt before him and did him homage. Tears stood in the eyes of his nephew, young Roger of Béziers. "Heaven keep you, uncle, you have saved Languedoc," he said, and Raymond held his hand and looked proudly over these men who swore to serve him.

"Rome has stirred a hornet's nest this day. It is for us gentlemen to make her feel the sting."

They acclaimed him again with ringing "*Vivas.*" Profiting by the uproar, Hubert of Gervaudan helped Father Castelnau to his feet, and supported him out of the hall to where his retinue waited, hugely frightened by the tumult, and in no way reassured by the sight of the holy legate. His robe hung in tatters and blood ran down his face, while he walked with evident difficulty. No word passed his lips, and when he was set upon his mule and Count Hubert, speaking very earnestly, asked him to let moderation wait upon anger, he made no an-

swer. But he shook the count's hand roughly from his bridle, and in those deep eyes burning beneath a bloody forehead, Hubert read an implacable resolve.

That same night, when the news of this disastrous rupture was noised abroad, wise men became troubled. The Abbot of St. Gilles, a moderate man and a good Christian, seeing hell yawning before the south, called the consuls and the chief inhabitants of the town to gaze with him into the infernal depths. Whereupon they, being properly alarmed, spent the night in embassies between the prince and the priest. Empty labor. Neither would listen. Raymond refused to yield one jot in his insulted pride, Pierre of Castelnau held himself in the cast-iron fetters of his resentment against the outrage done to himself, and through him to Holy Church. Nothing would have stayed him then from his maddened frenzy to carry the story to Innocent at Rome, and in the last hours of the night, when the pulse of a new day began to throb faintly over the world, he shook the dust of St. Gilles from off his feet and set out for the river bank. With him went two monks of Cîteaux and Alfor, who also had a thirst to slake and a tale to tell. Pierre's arrival was opportune for him. Speeding from the palace gardens, he had found the legate's lodging and claimed his protection. His escape proved easy enough. Men had completely forgotten him in the overwhelming disturbance of this new quarrel between their lord and the Church.

Half an hour after their departure, but ignoring it, Bertrand rode through the city gates with Gaston and Bûchon and a few men-at-arms. He was bound for Crein, which lay near Beaucaire, and therefore followed Castelnau's path. Gloomily enough he rode. None understood better the crisis now thrust upon his country,

yet in this moment his thoughts were captive to another measure. For Hubert of Gervaudan had sought him out when the excited crowd dispersed, and had looked him very straightly in the face.

"I am an old man, Bertrand," said he, "and you are young. There is a chivalry due from youth to age. Not in arms. I can still prove that strength upon any man, thank God."

"When and where you please," said Bertrand harshly.

But inwardly he shrank from the idea. It was pardonable to love his friend's wife, but how did honor stand in the fight of a young man against one double his years! And yet how might he refuse satisfaction to the husband he had wronged? Herein Honor wandered at fault, and the beginning of her straying lay in his love for Rosamunde—which he held pardonable!

Now, the stormy scene in the council hall, following so quickly upon that madness in the arbor, had temporarily driven the latter from his mind. But such a memory could not sleep for long. Even before Gervaudan came to him, thought wrestled with the sting, and although he had yielded to the greatest temptation of his life, and although the weeks passed in deliberate evil intent had brought forth the inevitable fruit of an overwhelming, unrestrained desire, yet below the loose morals and selfish ideas of the men of his age, there was the honesty and chivalry which had marked his as yet untried character. And partly, perhaps, because of this strata of rock beneath the flood of passions, and partly, perhaps, because the woman's strength had touched him more than he realized at the time, Bertrand of Crein began to feel something he had never felt in his life before. The sensation gripped him by the throat. It was shame bidding him look upon fear. Fear! And

what of his motto, *"Crein ne rien crain!"* when he was afraid—of himself!

He sickened in heart now because he could not meet a man's eyes.

"From all my friends, I chose you to bring my wife in safety to me," said Hubert.

"I did not fail," muttered Bertrand.

"I know," was the quiet answer. "I tried you too high, unwittingly. For that I ask your pardon."

"You ask my pardon!" Bertrand stared at him then in wonder.

"Ay," said Hubert, "I am an old man and you are young, and she is young and fair beyond most women. You loved each other, and for so much shall not be blamed."

Bertrand remembered his own description of this man to Rosamunde. A gallant gentleman, the most loyal friend, the bravest fighter in Provence. As in a flash, all the beauty of their friendship rushed upon him, throwing into black relief the ugly patches which defiled love's passion.

"What now?" he asked and bowed his head.

"I tried you," said Count Hubert slowly, "now go back to Crein, and try yourself."

He put his hand upon the younger man's shoulder even as his father might have done.

"Thank heaven for a good woman's love, and make yourself worthy of it," he added.

And it was in a confused fantasy of Rosamunde's face and of Hubert's, of his aching desire for her, and of shame for the black shadow he had put upon friendship's sacred claim, that Bertrand rode in the gray dawn some half hour behind Pierre of Castelnau and his monks.

The mist was rising in great white clouds from the

breast of the Rhône. The river was not visible, but the rush of it over the stony bed fell mysteriously upon the ears. Riding slowly into the damp, clinging vapor, the monks perceived a stationary thickness looming upon the ever-shifting fog curtains, and came to an abrupt halt before a fisherman's cottage. A knocking on the door brought a dark-haired, olive-skinned man to their presence, and of him Father Pierre demanded permission to enter and rest until the passage of the river should be clear.

The man welcomed them courteously—this neighborhood still feared and respected Rome's emissaries—adding that they were the second party to honor his poor roof. "A knight and his page crossed the river an hour since in Gros-Jean's *chaloupe*. He departs on the moment for Fontvieille," and he pointed over the water.

"Bid him wait until I have said mass, and he shall be well paid to take us with him," said Pierre.

He entered the hut, followed by Alfor and the two monks. The knight and his page rose from the rough mud floor at their entrarce, and drew their hoods over their faces. A glint of armor shone beneath the knight's cloak, but in that dim light it was difficult to define objects clearly. The white mist rolled through the open door, and separated each figure from its fellow as in a sea of vapor.

"Benedicité," said Pierre, "will you hear the mass?"

A little choking sound came fog-strangled from where the page stood, the man apparently bowed his head. Then Father Pierre de Castelnau said mass, and when it was finished, he remained a few minutes in prayer. And as if the fervor of his soul communicated itself to those others, they too knelt on as if they, also, prayed, while the

mist curled about them, dwindled, floated in long sinuous curves through the doorway, and finally vanished.

Then Pierre rose from his knees and passed outside, and lo, the sun rising above the Chaîne des Alpines, upon whose rocky pinnacles was set the stronghold of the famous Counts of Baux. The glow turned Rhône water into a broken sheet of glittering blue, with rosy shadows in the dancing ripples where the crimson glory of the sunrise kissed them blushing into new life. It was at that moment of supreme silence before the day is fully born, when all Nature seems to hold her breath, waiting upon the departure of night, listening for the little "noiseless noise" of dawn, and drinking its fill of strength wherewith to accomplish the work of day.

This great peace hung upon the world, unbroken yet even by twittering birds, and Pierre of Castelnau, haughty legate, fanatic churchman, fierce, cruel man in the cause he held so dear, stood in its embrace, and, maybe, felt its spell. For he remained motionless upon the river bank, and the glitter died from his eyes, and an unwonted softness smoothed the lines of his erstwhile hardened countenance. He stood as one lost in thought, like a man who dreams strange dreams, so marvellously changed was his face. What did he dream? Surely in that moment he lost sight of revenge and ambition, of the blood of the innocent spilled upon the flames of wrath, surely like the fathers of old, he, too, beheld a vision, and saw love divine crowned by peace ineffable.

No one will ever know now what wider knowledge was vouchsafed him in those fleeting moments. He stood alone by the swift-flowing Rhône. Alfor and the two other monks were in the hut, bargaining with the fisherman for bread and wine. A little to the left, the knight and the page were mounting two horses which had been

brought for their service by a young esquire, while Bertrand of Crein and his men approached, riding from the woods behind, scarcely a hundred yards away.

Dancing round the bend of the river came a boat manned by two men in fishermen's garb. They pulled into the bank, and at the noise of the oars, Pierre of Castelnau started from his dream.

"Gros-Jean of Fontvieille?" he questioned.

The oarsman nodded. He who held the rudder stood up in the frail craft.

"Being neither heretics nor Jews," said Castelnau, "you will not refuse shelter to an apostle of Holy Church who flies the land of persecution."

The man held out his hand. "Come, holy father," said he, "the waters of the Rhône shall carry you into safety."

With that new-born gentleness still upon his face, the legate turned to call his companions. At the same moment the helmsman leaped on to the bank and drove a knife into his back, then as quickly leaped again into the boat, which shot out into the stream beneath the powerful strokes of the two men, and vanished round the high protecting bank.

Pierre of Castelnau sank to his knees. He would have cried aloud, but the blood gurgled into his throat and choked him. He had been stabbed through the lungs, and his life was going with his every strangled breath.

The murder had happened so silently and so quickly that only the knight and his page witnessed it. A cry of horror broke from both, and when Pierre fell prone on the grass, they started forward but checked their horses as Bertrand rode from behind the hut and seeing a wounded man, spurred to him and dismounted.

The face of the dying Castelnau looked up at him.

Thunderstruck he gazed, then as the awful enormity of this murder rushed upon him, he dropped to his knees, and fumbled vainly to staunch the wound.

"Let be," said Pierre faintly, and a grim smile hovered over his face. "Hast thou found me, oh, mine enemy!"

"Now by our hatred," said Bertrand, "I would to God I lay here in your place."

"Ay," said Pierre, "the rivers of the south shall run red from the spring of this my blood shed to-day."

With a dying effort he raised himself in Bertrand's arms.

"Bear witness," he gasped, "I have fought for Rome—I have hated her enemies, yet this morning I beheld as in a vision—there is a greater than hatred—love——"

His hands beat the air, blood gushed from his throat. In the trees above birds began their morning hymn. Bertrand thought to grasp a dead man, but for the last time Pierre of Castelnau's lips moved.

"The Holy Father shall hold Raymond guiltless. *In manus tuas, Dominé.*"

The words died in his throat. A great shudder waved through his body, and Bertrand laid him dead on the ground at the very moment that Alfor and his brethren came running from the hut. Their cries also brought Gaston, with Bûchon and the men-at-arms, upon the scene, while the fishermen completed the bewildered and horrified assembly.

The knight spoke swiftly to his page. "Let us escape unnoticed while we can, or such a net may catch us in its tangle."

But the page's bright eyes were devouring the scene, and he made no stir to leave it.

"Red wine of life, red wine of death. The cork must be drawn for us all! What matter though if the bottle

has been filled to overflowing," and he threw back his head and laughed with a rich, full sense of delight that whipped a man's blood to hear.

But the knight put his hand on the horse's bridle, and made to pull him away.

"You have not lived long enough for me," he said. "There is sweet life enough awaiting us both in Montpellier. Will you suffocate in a convent wall—die inch by inch, a madwoman raving for the life that shall be yours no more?"

So the page was a woman!

The picture checked her gaiety. She would have followed him then, but Bertrand had suddenly leaped upon his horse, and came thundering across their path, followed by Gaston and Bûchon and his soldiers, all sweeping in hot haste back towards St. Gilles to warn Count Raymond of this black deed. The knight and the lady in her page's dress were obliged to draw aside before the impetuous rush, and in that same fraction of time, Alfor the monk, running furiously, leaped in front of them.

"In nomine Patrius et Félius et Spéritus Sanctus," he stormed. "Bear witness that I denounce Count Bertrand of Crein in the countship of Beaucaire, as the vile assassin of heaven's chosen apostle, Pierre of Castelnau——"

What more he added was lost in the rush of horses, as knight and page spurred past him. The wood swallowed them, and he was alone with his hate and his dark soul, and the dead legate lying upon the bank of the Rhône.

"Kyrie Eleison! Kyrie Eleison!" wailed the two monks, kneeling beside the body.

"Kyrie Eleison! Kyrie Eleison!" The wind caught

the dirge and carried it the length and breadth of Languedoc. *Kyrie Eleison! Kyrie Eleison!* The Rhône received it upon her bosom and bore it to the sea. The sea beat it upon the shores of the Gulf. The waves carried it to the walls of Narbonne, of Perpignan and Montpellier. The tides swept it again up the rivers, the rivers whispered it to the mist sleeping upon their bosoms. The mists drawn up into the heat of the day died in whispering it to Béziers.

Kyrie Eleison! Kyrie Eleison! The bells of St. Nazaire of Béziers surely caught it into their music on that sunny May morning, although St. Gilles lay seventy miles and more away. What else seemed to muffle their silvery tones as in some sad, prophetic cadence of woe to come?

Kyrie Eleison! Kyrie Eleison!

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOT foot swept Bertrand to St. Gilles and told his tale. Count Raymond heard it in horror, then sat like a man turned to stone. In that moment he yielded to despair, perceiving in this murder that heaven was against him, and desired his perdition.

For now if Rome could not be pacified, what should satisfy her vengeance? And how to appease her? None knew the murderers! Had they settled a private feud, or did they think to serve Provence? But they had shut a trap upon Count Raymond from which he was not to escape until he had paid the uttermost farthing.

This way and that he twisted, sought his councillors, hung upon Gervaudan's wisdom. His own brain worked with lightning speed to see the danger, but lost sight of decision in the mists of fear. The anger which had driven Pierre forth was shrivelled now. Defiance lay inert. His irresolute soul was cramped by dread. How to appease Rome! Where was the scape-goat for his need?

Hard on Bertrand's heels came a knight and his page, riding through the crowded streets. St. Gilles swarmed abroad like a disturbed ant-nest. The unrest of their lords had infected the people. Men looked at each other with pale faces, spoke in whispers, conjectured this horror and that. Women clutched their children as if to save them from the flames they pictured already blaz-

ing up to heaven, soldiers grunted oracularly, hinted at war, bloody sieges, at glorious deaths in the service of Provence. Over all reigned confusion stumbling in a fog of ignorance and dread.

The knight cast anxious glances about him. He was of Rouergue, yet no friend to Raymond, a stranger here, and mighty desirous of getting his fair companion safely to Montpellier. But the lady had a pretty will of her own, and nothing had served but that she must seek out the lady of Gervaudan, if so be she were at St. Gilles, before she would consent to push on southwards.

Private reasons making it impossible for her to move openly in the matter, it became necessary to find a secret method—scarcely an easy achievement for two strangers. The knight grew impatient, fretting at the danger she ran with every minute lost in St. Gilles, but the lady sat quietly on her horse, her quick eyes roving from face to face in the crowd, seeking a friend to serve her. Suddenly she touched the knight's arm.

"That man will do. Bring him to me," she said, and showed a tall, burly figure clad in black and yellow, with three red roses worked upon the breast of his surcoat. He forced a way through the people with scant ceremony, but his livery seemed popular, for they made room eagerly, and one or two shouted: "A Crein! Vive Crein! Long live the Red Rose of War!"

The knight intercepted his passage, and in response to a surly question indicated the page. Whereupon Bûchon—it was he—no other—came unwillingly to her side.

Small heed she gave to his surliness. She bent down in her saddle, and whispered swiftly:

"You serve my lord of Crein?"

"Ay!" he growled.

"Will you save his life?"

He looked up then, and his face satisfied her.

"Listen!" she said hurriedly. "I must have secret speech with the Countess of Gervaudan—she who was Lady Rosamunde of Tracey. If you value your master's safety, bring me to her unperceived."

Bûchon peered suspiciously at the muffling hood through which her voice came so faintly.

"Who are you?" he said. "How shall I trust you?"

"Go to the countess. Tell her I bring word of life and death from Yvonne of Sens. Good fool, she knows me, but time is short, and I may not stay. If you would save Count Bertrand from the stake, do not let me carry my message hence unspoken."

The page's manner was so strangely earnest that Bûchon decided to do as he asked. Bertrand was closeted with Count Raymond, or Bûchon would have carried the tale to him. As it happened, he could see no harm in telling the countess, and at all times he was zealous for Bertrand's safety.

"Come!" he said abruptly, and knight and page followed him away from the throng down a hedge-sheltered lane, which skirted the palace walls. Presently they came to a postern gate, and here he told the page to dismount and follow him into the palace.

"Now, *par die!* You shall not do this madness," whispered the knight in anger, but she jumped lightly to the ground.

"Hold the horses, friend, and look for me as quickly as may be," she said, and with that darted through the gate after Bûchon. He led her across a narrow yard into a small dark passage, a back way to the state rooms where Rosamunde lodged. At last they came to a door and behind it to a small room where Bûchon bade the

stranger wait, and himself disappeared through a second door beyond. In a few minutes he reappeared with Enid, who looked curiously at the page, and asked him to follow her.

"Not you," she said as Bûchon made to go with them.

"Let be," he snapped. "I owe it to my master to keep your lady guarded."

"Pity 'tis you don't see your duty so plain to other folk," retorted Enid, but made no further objection.

Rosamunde came forward eagerly when the three entered her room. Before she could speak, however, Yvonne glided close, and whispered:

"Do not name me aloud. I risk my life in coming here. It is in your hands." She drew her hood a little open, and Rosamunde saw her face and the boyish trunk and hose.

"Yvonne!" she murmured, all amazed. "Yvonne of the Beating Heart!"

"Ay! Once Yvonne the nun, but the bird has broken down the prison bars. Hush!" she shrouded her face again. "Listen! Pierre of Castelnau is dead, and Alfor the monk comes aflame with passion to denounce Count Bertrand of Crein as his assassin."

"Mother of Heaven!" exclaimed Rosamunde. "What are you saying?"

"I was there, I saw the legate standing on the river's bank. A boat came round the bend and touched the shore. Two men sat in it. One rose, leaped upon the bank and drove a knife into the holy father's back, then springing again into the boat, he and his companion rowed furiously away and disappeared."

"Mother of Heaven!" exclaimed Rosamunde; "but how is Count Bertrand concerned in this fearful deed?"

"Why, as the legate fell, Count Bertrand rode from the wood and seeing him there, got from his horse and went to succor him. Then came Alfor and his monks from the hut and finding Pierre of Castelnau dead with the count kneeling over him, forthwith declared him guilty and even now press swiftly upon St. Gilles, clamoring for vengeance."

Rosamunde listened, bewildered, then indignant.

"Let Alfor tell his lie," she said contemptuously. "None will believe him."

"Will you be so sure? What of Rome's vengeance? If she demands Count Bertrand's death, do you think Raymond will not give him up? That, however, is not my affair. I have warned you. My life is in your hands. Now I go."

She turned, but Rosamunde caught her hand.

"It was kindly in you to come—noble, since you ran a danger. Now may I not serve you? What are you doing here?"

Yvonne looked round. Both Enid and Bûchon were at a discreet distance. She twitched open her hood again, and showed her lovely little face bubbling over with joy.

"I am living," she said mysteriously. "Cupid broke my prison doors, Cupid waits yonder, young, handsome, fond. Now it's heigh for Montpellier, and if Rome's hand stretches so far to grasp Yvonne the nun, it will be across the sea, and heigh for Syria. Sunshine and love, music and feast, with the coins tinkling round my ankles. I'll teach the Saracen girls how to dance!"

She broke into the low, rich laugh Rosamunde remembered so well.

"You have broken your vows," said she in horror, yet in pity. "Will you go to hell?"

"Please heaven!" laughed the nun, "for, as says Aucassin, there go the pleasant people on earth; gay dames and gallant knights, and boon companions who can sing and dance, while to heaven go the dull and pious, the fusty women and snuffling monks. I'm for hell, lady"—suddenly her face changed—"but not on earth," she said earnestly. "You'll not set Rome on my tracks. I staked my freedom on your mercy, when I came to save your lover."

"What manner of woman should I be to reward you so vilely?" said Rosamunde. "Go in peace."

The sunshine flashed again into Yvonne's face. "Then stay me no longer," she cried, "but bid your guide bring me to the postern. God keep your lover safe, and send you a blind husband."

She was gone, laughing still. Bûchon, at a sign from Rosamunde, sped after her, and saw her safely through the gate to where the impatient knight waited. She sprang lightly into the saddle as Bûchon retreated and shut the postern upon them.

"St. Julian grant that you have done with madness," fumed the knight.

She gave a swift glance up and down the deserted lane. "Do not scold, beloved. I have thrown a sop to heaven for this, my sweet, sweet sin," and she stooped and pressed the red ripeness of her mouth on to his.

And he kissed her and held the world well lost for Yvonne of the Beating Heart, and so they sped away towards the fuller joys awaiting them in Montpellier, while Rosamunde pondered the warning, and moment by moment felt confidence give way to fear.

"Let him decide," she thought at last, and sent Enid to see if Bûchon had returned. He stood at the door on edge with anxiety for his master's welfare.

"Bûchon," said Rosamunde, "go and seek your master, and bring him here, and then seek my lord the Count of Gervaudan, and tell him I have urgent need of his presence."

Bûchon bowed and went, and Rosamunde set herself to wait for the coming of her husband and her lover.

Bertrand came first, pale and iron stiff, and after one long look at his fair lady, held his eyes steadily averted, while she did not look at him at all.

"You sent for me," he began formally.

Rosamunde bent her head, but for a moment the words would not come. Then Bertrand looked at her again, saw her pale and trembling, and love flamed in his heart, only to pause before the clean waters which Hubert's nobility had loosed in his soul.

"God knows if you were right," he said thickly, "but I would have you forgive me who cannot quite repent as yet."

"I forgive——" she bent her head a moment, then raised it and looked him very fully in the eyes. "I was right, Bertrand. You would have taken so much, much less than I could give, had God willed it so." And in the wonder of her eyes he read the depths of a love which exceeded passion in such marvellous measure that he drew in his breath before the revelation, and fell on his knees at her feet.

"God have mercy on me," he muttered. "What have I lost!"

"I shall love you all my life," said Rosamunde, and she stretched out her hands yearningly over his bowed head, yet did not touch him. "But we owe a debt, and after to-day, you and I will meet no more."

He understood and silently acquiesced. Then he rose and she told him why she had summoned him, and as

she was speaking Hubert came into the room. He halted abruptly at the sight of Bertrand, but Rosamunde moved toward him with frank dignity.

"Count Bertrand is here at my bidding," she said, and now her voice rang firmly. "The matter is urgent, and I could not lose time in searching the palace for you both. Also, there is need for secrecy."

Then she told her tale, being careful, however, not to name Yvonne, and when it was ended, she looked from man to man.

"Now you shall take counsel together, and do what seems wisest to both," she said, and turned and left them with never another glance at Bertrand although only heaven knew when, if ever, they two should look at each other again.

A little silence, then Hubert drew a deep breath, and passed his hand over his gray head, and Bertrand frowned, and bit his lip. For both understood how she had pledged each to the other, Hubert pledged in nobility to advise his friend honestly, Bertrand pledged forever in honor to his friend because of that friend's help.

"You must go," said Gervaudan. "Time enough to find out the truth when this monk arrives, and I do not like Raymond's mood."

"Neither do I like running from a priest," said Bertrand.

"Tut, man! Will you step open-eyed into the wolf's jaws, and rob Provence of your help when she most wants it? Go to Foix, wait for my messenger, and keep your retreat open to Arragon."

Then as Bertrand still hesitated:

"You must go for Raymond's sake, or you put him upon the horns of a dilemma. If Rome insists upon a punishment, it will not be easy for him to refuse, and if

he yield you up, he will set Provence in an uproar. Now you shall cut this knot by quietly disappearing."

But Bertrand demurring yet, he urged him with greater vehemence.

"Man, there is work calling you. You shall spread the news of the danger threatening us, you shall warn the small chieftains to be prepared. There will be soldiers to organize and to drill, strongholds to fortify. And above all men's hearts to strengthen. Carry the rose of Crein far and wide to serve the country's need. Provence cannot spare such as you to glut Rome's vengeance."

The advice, if unpalatable, was wise, and Bertrand no young hot-head to disdain prudence. Moreover, it fell in with his inclination to put as many miles as possible between himself and Rosamunde.

"I count on you to let me know when Provence needs me," he said to Hubert at parting, then rode away followed as ever by Gaston the page, and Bûchon the one-time hewer of wood. And Rosamunde from her window watched the master, and Enid from hers watched the man, and the hearts of both women were wrung with longing for the might-have-been.

But what were women's aching hearts to the ache of a whole country? For that afternoon a long procession of monks came winding into the town, carrying in their midst a bier having on it the dead body of that saintly apostle, Pierre of Castelnau. Him they bore to the basilica of St. Gilles, and laid before the altar, and summoned all the town to lamentation and to prayer for the repose of his great soul.

Thus, where only twenty-four hours before song and dance, feast and tourney had revelled through the day, black horror and shuddering dread held sway. Song was

turned into mourning, joy fled before the specter of death.

In Count Raymond's palace, Alfor the monk stood before the overlord of Toulouse and claimed vengeance upon Bertrand of Crein who, he swore, had slain the apostle of heaven.

Raymond heard him in silence, cast furtive looks at this lord and that, took no heart from their grim faces. The teeth of his trap held him relentlessly, worked deeper at every struggle. How deny justice to Rome? How give up his loyal friend and tried soldier?

"You have no proof," he said at last, weakly enough.

"Proof!" snarled Alfor. "I found the sainted father dead at the feet of this villain count, whose hands were red with the blood he had spilled. My brethren will bear witness. There was a knight, also—do you ask more proof? The Holy Father will scarcely be so greedy."

An angry growl greeted this insolence. Count Philippe stepped forward.

"Your Highness will not let a black villain and beggarly monk befoul the name of a true gentleman? Only last night this same Alfor attempted the life of Count Bertrand. Your Highness, he lies by hate."

But Alfor never moved his eyes from Raymond. He did not fear. Pierre of Castelnau lying dead in the basilica of St. Gilles was a sure safeguard for every priest in the town.

"Had I killed him, the legate would now live," said Alfor. "I claim justice against his murderer."

Raymond held up his hand for silence, and strove to see his way. But the goad of indecision turned him into a dozen different paths in as many seconds. His nephew watched him anxiously. He himself perceived

but one possible line of action. What adverse spirit blinded his uncle?

"Send for Bertrand of Crein," said the latter at last. "We will hear his story."

But Bertrand had gone and none knew whither save Count Hubert, who had no answer for any questions.

Then Alfor shrieked yet louder, crying that this flight was proof of guilt, and demanding immediate confiscation of all Bertrand's lands and people to the Church. But at that, uprose the great body of Provençal knighthood, and swore that Crein should go unmolested, and that Count Bertrand should suffer no robbery. And the Counts of Rouergue, and Armagnac, and they of Comminges and Foix, vassals of Raymond's, but ever rebellious and quick to war against him, leaped before the throne and with fierce looks and angry words vowed that if Raymond's stomach would swallow a lewd monk's insolence, their own stomachs were too delicate for such fare, and that if he were for Rome against one of his own people, why they were for Provence and themselves against him. And with that they tramped out of the hall, carrying most of their fellows with them, and leaving Raymond to deal as best he might with the situation. He, well-nigh choking with fury and helplessness, bade Alfor retire—he would make his decision known later. The monk went, sullen, muttering, yet not ill-pleased with his work, the hall emptied, and Raymond was alone with his nephew, Roger of Béziers.

A great sob burst from the unhappy count. In a moment Roger's hand was on his shoulder.

"Take heart, uncle, and stand firm. There is no other way."

"Ay, on dry ground," answered Raymond bitterly, "but how shall a man stand firm in a quagmire?"

"He shall not tread it. Listen, uncle! Here the roads divide, and you cannot follow both at the same time. Heaven knows you guiltless of this foul murder, Languedoc knows it, and will die to bear witness to your innocence. Therefore, you shall express a real gift to Rome, and offer to make such reasonable compensation as may be expected for the murder of her legate in your realms. But having done all that an honest man could do, you shall remain steadfast in resisting oppression, neither shall you yield to extortion."

"I fear for Provence," groaned Raymond.

"Provence will not thank you for your fear."

"Tut, boy! You are young and headstrong. Will you see the country dismembered?"

"Ay, rather than squirm whole in shame."

His handsome face glowed with the brave spirit he carried.

"Will you talk so much of fear, uncle?" he cried. "By God, it is better to die fighting a fear than to live trembling at its beck and call."

Then as Raymond made no answer, he went sorrowfully away to find his mother and prepare her for immediate departure to Béziers.

North, south, east, and west rode the lords of Provence from St. Gilles to their various homes, east and south sped the messengers to Rome, west hastened Bertrand of Crein. Thibault of Nîmes sought Hubert of Gervaudan.

"Where is my son?" asked he.

"With Bertrand," answered Hubert.

"Heaven keep him in honor. Tell him his father would not have him elsewhere," quoth Thibault. "I am for Nîmes. And you, Hubert?"

"Montpellier and sea-breezes. My lady is from the north and does not bear our southern heat too well."

"You do wisely to keep her near the sea and convenient ships—at a pinch, friend, at a pinch."

The two men looked at each other, nodded, then said farewell.

CHAPTER XXIX

NOW what harvest did Provence reap of that grim sowing on the banks of Rhône water? The crime was traced to two servants of Raymond's household, who killed Castelnau hoping for great reward from their master. Raymond himself was guiltless both of intent or deed. But although in years to come the Pope should admit Raymond's innocence, it now served his purpose to shriek his guilt throughout Christendom, and demand vengeance for the murder of Rome's holy legate.

Forth went the messengers. Letters to every prince and duke and count and knight in the kingdom.

"Rise, soldiers of Christ! Rise, princes of Christianity! The blood of the just demands that the shields of your faith be turned towards our enemies. . . . Prevent the ruin of the Church, smite with the sword these heretics who are more dangerous even than the Saracens."

Proclamations far and wide of material and spiritual profit. The seed fell upon well-prepared ground. Had not the fierce monks of Cîteaux spent years in this mission? Two names stand out very clearly against the red background of their efforts. That of Pierre, Abbot of Vaux Cernay, bigoted partisan and chronicler of all that happened, and that of Arnaud d'Amouri, the Abbot of Cîteaux, he who was named the Abbot of abbots of

whom it was written, "His heart was sheathed with the triple iron of pride, bigotry, and cruelty."

He hated Raymond of Toulouse with a deadly, implacable rancor, and Rome made him the leader of this first movement over every head. Even Simon of Montfort was content to follow him, his own time coming later.

From the north, from the south, from the east, from the west, men poured into Lyons, which became the headquarters of the crusading army. Men from Burgundy and Flanders, Picardy and Normandy, Aquitaine and Poitou. Men from England, from Germany, from Spain, from Italy, all wearing upon the breast a red cross, symbol of faith and witness of zeal. A strange assembly of trained soldiers, of priests and laymen, of young and old, all differing in manners and costumes, even in speech, but one and all burning to spoil the rich southern towns and in such profitable fashion win absolution for their souls.

Neither did they lack leaders. Philippe Auguste, while refusing to join the crusade in person, had issued commands to his great vassals, which commands falling in with their own inclinations, they had been pleased to obey. Famous names echoed in the streets of Lyons. Eudes, Duke of Burgundy, and cousin to that fair Abbess of St. Ursula. Hervé, Count of Nevers, the Counts of St. Pol, of Bar, of Anjou, the lords of Aquitaine and of Picardy, not forgetting one Rodolphe of Verlay. And above all the great soldier, Simon of Montfort, who later should sear Provence into a blackened desolation.

And here one may pause to consider briefly this man although he did not assume supreme command in the Albigenses War until a later date than that upon which this story ends. Yet he, too, should touch the lives of

Bertrand de Crein and the fair lady he loved, play a not unimportant part in their destiny.

A man of inflexible determination and unquenchable ambition, seeking always fresh paths towards his desires. Haughty, imperious, he could brook no rivals on his road. He had fought in Palestine, less for spiritual reward than the hope of earthly gain. Now the prospect of this crusade at home offered him at one stroke the fulfillment of his hopes. He would wrench the kingdom of Provence from Raymond and wear its crown himself.

Proud, violent, and imperious, he could, if necessary, humble himself to attain a coveted end. Bloodthirsty in his rage, never afraid to shed blood, he at times showed himself amenable to kindlier impulses. Daring in his intrigues, he planned them cautiously and executed them audaciously. Religious because religion served his interests, he had real periods of spiritual absorption, remaining long hours in prayer and rising from them freshly primed with the genius and fury of battle.

Such was the Count of Montfort, now biding his time in Lyons, while the man he meant to destroy sought help in vain from Europe against the enemies at his gates.

Thus sped the months of that year 1208-1209. Now what had Raymond of Toulouse done to save his country?

He first sought help from Europe, but in vain. England was in the throes of revolution against the tyranny of John Lackland, and her people refused help to any kinsman of his. Internal dissensions crippled the German Empire. Italy was a nest of young republics all fighting each other for their own aggrandizement, and

not one would turn aside from its personal interest and ambitions. The King of Arragon, Raymond's vassal and kinsman, hung back through fear of the Church. And France? Ambition had sapped that first refusal to Foulquet. Insidious promises came from Rome. Provence would be a fair jewel to add to the crown.

How should Raymond save his country?

"Fight!" said Count Roger, and Hubert of Gervaudan and Philippe of Albret. And "Fight!" echoed the lords of Foix and of Comminges. "Fight!" said Bertrand of Crein, who, tired of hiding, had come openly to Arles, defying Rome. And she, too busy elsewhere for the moment, was content to let him be, biding her time patiently, but never forgetting, having Bishop Foulquet and Brother Alfor at her elbow to jog memory.

Raymond turned haggard eyes upon the fierce, eager faces of his friends. He looked old and broken and ominously cowed.

"Fight!" he echoed peevishly, "will you defy all Europe?"

"Listen, uncle!" The young Viscount of Béziers rose from his seat and addressed Raymond with a quiet confidence that contrasted strikingly with the latter's vacillation. "You shall fortify all your strong places. They will be hard nuts between Rome's teeth. Her men must sit down before them in long and bloody sieges. And what are most of her soldiers? A confused rabble of strangers enlisted for only forty days, at the end of which time they may, if they choose, return home and enjoy such absolution as has been promised them. We shall see the army weaken by thousands, and your resistance will nerve Languedoc to a valor undreamed of to-day. You shall teach men how to live in glory, sire."

"And if we fail?" said Raymond.

"You will have taught them how to die," answered Roger simply.

A silence fell upon the group, broken at last by Bertrand.

"Crein is at your service, my lord."

"And Gervaudan," said Hubert.

"And Albret."

"Comminges."

"Foix."

"Béarn."

And so on through the list of barons present. But the overlord of that great realm seemed not to hear. He sat with his eyes downcast, plucking at his beard. Then he rose, but still did not look at them. He spoke and his voice trailed weakly as if fearful lest echo should mock his shame.

"I thank you, gentlemen, for your loyalty, but stand beyond its need. Rome has accepted my submission, and will spare Provence."

A gasp fell from every mouth. Bertrand stepped forward.

"At what price?" he asked.

"The countship of Melgueil and the cession of my seven principal garrisons. I would advise you gentlemen to follow my example, and win Rome's clemency while you may."

He waited. No one spoke or moved. In the silence born of his shame, Raymond of Toulouse took a last farewell of honor and of friends.

God knows he sank low enough in that moment when they turned their backs upon him, but he had still lower depths to plumb to satisfy Rome's vengeance.

Seven castles ceded to Rome. A promise to war against his own people. The degradation of that pen-

ance in his own church of St. Gilles. The chronicles tell us that the population of the entire country flocked to witness their overlord, barefooted, naked save for a loin cloth, with a cord round his neck and a candle in his hand, prostrate himself before Arnaud of Citeaux. He confessed his sins, and promised to abjure them in the future. Then the abbot passed his stole round the neck of this Count of Toulouse, and holding the two ends in one hand and a rod in the other, flogged the greatest prince of Christendom naked into the church, up the aisle between a shuddering, gasping throng, and so to the foot of the high altar, where he fell prone to receive a pardon "which no other sovereign in the world would have bought at such a price."

Mad! Mad with fear of the Church! If the vengeance of the priests gave to Provence her Gomorrha, it was her own prince who opened the flood-gates of destruction upon the country he should have died to save.

And the pity of it all, that he acted not in cowardice or in real infamy, but in the fatal weakness of a weak man, who, hoping to avert disaster by humility and submission, forgot that "fanaticism is blind and cupidity knows not mercy."

The June of 1209 saw him (at his own request) in Lyons, and appointed one of the leaders in this crusade against his own people. At the end of the month the army moved, a human flood swelling upon the left bank of Rhône's flood, and sweeping down upon the doomed land. It came so swiftly that men were taken by surprise. The living wave rolled onward, overwhelmed Venaissin and had crossed the river and filled Montpellier before the town properly realized it.

Viscount Roger was in Béziers, prepared to hold it against the world. With him stayed Hubert of Ger-

vaudan. When the news came, both set forth to Montpellier, Roger to make one last appeal for his people, Hubert to bring his lady to Béziers.

Two days before they set out, Bertrand, who had been organizing the defenses of Crein, came hurrying to Roger's aid. He was to command the garrison of Béziers when the viscount departed to Carcassonne. The town had need of him, and he went swiftly, taking Montpellier on the way. A dangerous route for him, but the quickest, and Rosamunde dwelt there. He had no hope of seeing her, but it would be something to breathe the air she breathed—a crumb to quicken the hunger of this past year, during which he had not once set eyes upon her.

He looked much as he looked of old, save that his mouth had taken firmer lines, and his eyes had lost their merry carelessness. What had this year taught him? Bertrand laughed grimly to himself. "The first sight of her will tell me that," thought he.

Now as he came stealthily from Lunel across the plains to Montpellier a party of four horsemen rode toward them from the latter town and barred the way.

The foremost among them, a man of gigantic stature, his face hidden by his vizor, challenged Bertrand to halt or give the pass-word.

"Pass-word!" said Bertrand, stiffening; "since when does a Provençal knight need a pass-word to journey in Provence?"

"Since France inclined to give Provence a new ruler," came the answer.

"Oh," said Bertrand and took his sword. "Will you fight for that ruler, sir! You and I should be a match and the numbers of our servants are equal."

The big man seemed to hesitate.

"Do you doubt my worth?" asked Bertrand with a

deadly courtesy. "I am Bertrand of Crein," and he took off his helmet for all the world to see the man it shielded.

"And I," said the other, "am Simon de Montfort and you and I have met before."

With that he, also, removed his helmet and the two men saw each other face to face.

Then Bertrand laughed very joyously.

"I promised you a welcome, count. Great joy shall I have in killing you to-day."

But Simon de Montfort also laughed and grimly. "You promised your sword and many thousand such to welcome me, sir count, and I must deal with numbers rather than with one. Yet I will pray the fortune of war to grant you and me the favor of a single fight before we call quits forever."

"No time like the present," said Bertrand and half drew his sword.

Simon de Montfort pointed to a troop of horsemen coming along the road himself had taken.

"Arnaud's servants," said he. "I could fight you with all my heart for you are a gallant man and my blood warms towards you. But the abbot has sworn your destruction and his men would seize you from me. I would not have it said they came to my help against you, neither will I quarrel with the abbot in holding you from them. Therefore, for my sake, and for your own honor's sake, go, I pray, while you may and heaven send me a fairer opportunity of slaying you."

"Amen," quoth Bertrand; "my prayer goes before yours, in all save one hope—that it is I who will do the slaying."

They bowed courteously to each other and then Bertrand spurred on his way, amazed at this chivalry from

one he had deemed little given to such generosity. The abbot's men glanced curiously at the cloaked and hooded party, but Simon de Montfort shouted an order to let them pass, and thus Bertrand reached Montpellier in safety. He sent his men into the town separately to avoid notice, and entered it himself in company only of Bûchon and Gaston. All three wore plain clothing, with the embroidered roses hidden from view, and hoods to muffle their faces. Thus Bertrand of Crein took a risk for the sake of forbidden love, and reaped the reward of love's daring. For as he rode slowly into the square, he saw his lady standing on the cathedral steps, with a crowd of excited people surging around her.

CHAPTER XXX

WHEN Marie, daughter to the lord of Montpellier, married Pedro of Arragon, she brought the town as her dowry, but no love to sweeten the gift. Husband and wife lived apart, he in Arragon, she in Montpellier. A temporary reconciliation had been effected about a year previously, and the king came in stealth to visit his queen. The people of the city hated him, and it was deemed wiser for him to reach the palace by the secret way beneath the fortifications. He came and went in safety, but the reconciliation did not last. Fresh quarrels arose, and when Rosamunde came to Montpellier the king had retired to Arragon, while the queen maintained a lonely state in the palace on the hill whither Rosamunde never went. Arragon was too afraid of Rome to favor the wife of an avowed heretic like Hubert of Gervaudan.

So it happened that during all the weary months passed in Montpellier, Rosamunde only saw Queen Marie twice. The first time happened on the day that brought Bertrand into the town. An hour before his coming she went to hear mass in the cathedral with Enid and Margot. After the ceremony Enid asked permission to stop to make certain supplications to the Virgin, and Rosamunde consenting, they all withdrew into a small side chapel. Enid and Margot knelt before the shrine, the lady of Gervaudan sat upon a stone seat at the foot of a pillar. The veil was thrown back from her face. Sor-

row shadowed her eyes. The full red lips drooped. Had Foulquet seen her then, he might have remembered that morning when they rode from Paris, and she talked so easily of grief. Now love had ripened her beauty, but sorrow marked its bloom. A great weariness born of enforced walking in the fields of rejected happiness weighed upon her. The sap of her life ran dry.

A stir in the church broke upon her apathy. Queen Marie and her court had been hearing this mass, and were now coming down the aisle. Rosamunde rose, and for the first time saw the queen, little dreaming then how this pale, haughty woman was to touch her existence for one quivering moment, in which life and death hung in the balance. As little dreamed Marie of Montpellier—nor did she ever learn, so strangely does Fate use our very shadows without our knowledge.

The queen passed on, followed by her ladies and esquires. Last among the knights came a handsome man in blue and green, and at his heels trod a page wearing the same livery, with yellow curls clustering round his bright face.

Rosamunde stared hard for a moment before she recognized him, and as if her eyes were magnets for his, the page looked up in passing and saw her. He hesitated. The procession went on, and he slipped into the chapel.

"Greetings, lady!" said the musical voice. "You wear a tired face."

"And you a gay one," answered Rosamunde. "Do you still come to church?"

"Ay, and with a better heart in my happiness. Did you mark my lord? He serves the queen."

"I saw him." Rosamunde looked curiously at this woman, who was undoubtedly a great sinner, yet as un-

doubtedly went far happier than herself. And in whose being sin had no weight. As well try to capture the dancing sunbeams shimmering through the cathedral's gloom as to try and stamp Yvonne's soul with a sense of responsibility. Rosamunde, who should have shrunk in holy terror from an apostate nun, felt instead irresistibly drawn towards the bubbling fount of joyous life which sprang from her.

"I am glad to see you safe," she said.

"None know me here, and Sieur Etienne of Ronais can guard his own. What news of Count Bertrand, Lady Rosamunde?"

Rosamunde paused before answering, and Yvonne smiled as if she knew the joy it gave the other to hear his name.

"He is safe," said the lady of Gervaudan. "Thanks to you, he escaped from Rome's demands."

"Let him keep out of Montpeilier. Too soon we shall have every bishop in Christendom here to save our souls. And your lover is marked for special destruction."

The crimson waved to Rosamunde's face. Speechless she stood, for how could she deny the sweet word? Yvonne laughed and, stretching out her hand, laid it on her heart.

"What did I tell you in the convent garden?" She hummed wickedly enough,

"See, my red lips are not yet cold."

But Rosamunde thrust away her hand.

"Hush!" she said fiercely. "Will you press upon an open wound?" And then as if ashamed of an outburst wrung from her by intolerable pain, she signed to

Yvonne to go and herself moved toward the shrine and fell upon her knees.

But Yvonne did not go. A puzzled look crossed her face, then she slipped down beside Rosamunde, and twitched her veil.

"I am sorry, lady. Can love then be a torment?" she whispered.

The great lady turned a cold white face to the childish wondering face of the apostate nun.

"I am the loyal wife of Count Hubert of Gervaudan," she said. "Now trouble me no more."

No whit abashed looked Yvonne. On the contrary, a very real pity softened her brilliant eyes.

"La, la," she said, "'God spreads a carpet for every foot,' as saith the Persian sage, and you, it seems, must walk barefoot on thorns. Ah, well. Maybe the flowers shall bloom beneath your tread in paradise, when Yvonne is paying the price in hell for the roses she gathered on earth."

The prospect did not seem to disturb her. She only laughed again.

"The roses bloom for saint and sinner alike. 'Tis folly to mark the thorns too closely. Will you go, lady? The sacristan would lock the chapel."

Rosamunde rose and hurried into the aisle, leaving the others to follow. Her soul quivered with pain. It seemed to her that a hand had grasped her heart and was squeezing it with cruel fingers. The torture became almost physical, and she sped forward blindly in its grip.

But her way was hindered by the people who made a market-place of the holy building, buying and selling all manner of merchandise from live stock to bales of silk, and as she reached the door Yvonne with Enid and Margot overtook her. They all passed out into the daz-

zling sunshine together, and immediately became aware of a disturbance which seemed to have the cathedral steps for its center. Yvonne uttered an exclamation.

"By my sins and sweet Mary's pity! It is Sidi the Moor and little Blanche——"

"Blanche!" Enid pricked up her ears.

"Sidi bought her in the market. He loves her as his own. He is of the school of medicine, and a good friend to me. And now the mob has got them. Christ keep the child."

The van of the crusading army had entered Montpellier, and these northerners, with their prejudice against the south dangerously inflamed, had already found very much to their dislike. Most of all they hated the Jewish and Moorish population, and it needed but the sight of a white-clad Moor walking across the square, leading by the hand a girl undoubtedly of European birth, to set their ignorant brutality on fire.

"A Moslem! Infidel! Unbelieving dog!" they yelled. "Will you steal our children? Let the wench free, or you'll find hell in the road."

The Moor, an elderly man with a grave, kind face, made an appealing gesture, and drew the girl closer to him. Whereupon the crowd yelled again, and some one threw a stone—rather wildly, for it fell at Rosamunde's feet. She drew back, but some of the rough soldiery were between her and the door, and ringed her and Yvonne and Margot in with the Moor and the little girl.

The crowd was booing and shouting. Men and women came running up to see what was amiss. Wild stories flew from mouth to mouth. A Saracen murdering a Christian child! A Turk forcing a Christian girl to the infamy of his harem—a Jew dragging a child to the

abomination of a sacrifice which filled Jewish drinking vessels with the blood of baptized infants!

This last cry was taken up more loudly than the rest. Christians believed this horror of Jews. Now women screamed, men swore and fought with each other to come at the Saracen. He had already received three or four blows, but still held the child, who was sobbing in terror, when Yvonne ran swiftly down the steps and shrilly bade the assailants stay their hands. Her clear voice reached those nearest, and they paused, taken aback by the order. Then seeing only a page-boy, laughed derisively, and once more set upon the Saracen.

"You shall answer to the queen for this," cried Yvonne. "I tell you this man has befriended the child."

Again they paused. Yvonne lilted her voice up a tone. "She is one of you, yes, but you sold her to the Saracens. Now will you murder him whose money you took for her!"

Enid came quickly down the steps, and caught her arm.

"What are you saying, young sir? Who sold her to the Turks?"

The excitement swaying her momentarily arrested public attention. The front rank men forgot the Moor to gape at her, and the crowd behind surged fruitlessly against them. Yvonne spoke to the Moor.

"Where did you get her, Sidi-el-Mara?"

He wiped some blood off his face and answered quietly:

"Traders passing from the north to Acre sold her at Montpellier, three years since. I bought her. She has been a daughter to my house."

Enid clasped her hands. "Her name," she gasped, "for pity's sake, her name."

The child looked up with two eyes as blue as corn-flowers. Her hair hung in bright golden curls.

"I want to go home. I am afraid," she sobbed.

Enid fell on her knees beside her, Rosamunde moved closer. The Moor looked on with a puzzled face, and the crowd still forgot its animosity.

"Tell me your name, my pretty?" crooned Enid.

"Blanche," said the child. "Oh, good Sidi, take me home."

"What else?" asked Enid. "Don't be afraid now. They sha'n't hurt you."

The blue eyes looked wonderingly from her eager face to the dark face of her Moorish friend.

"Tell me your name," said he. "No harm shall touch you."

"Blanche of Verlay," she said, "but I belong to Sidi——"

Enid sprang up with a shriek that drowned the words, and at the same moment one of the soldiers ran forward and seized Blanche.

"Blanche of Verlay, eh!" he shouted. "Welcome to old friends, lass. Hi, lads!" and he swung round upon his fellows, "here's a prize for Red Rodolphe."

But Sidi-el-Mara had no mind to be robbed. He was no crushed and trembling Jew, but one of a race who had conquered Spain, and who held the resting-place of these Giaours' Prophet against the might of Christendom. Now his eyes flashed, and he flung off the men who hustled him.

"Give back the child," he said. "Will you rob me of that which has been paid for?"

Verlay's man laughed. "You shall buy her again at Count Rodolphe's pleasure—ah, dog, pig defiled——"

Sidi, maddened by this prospective loss, had whipped

out a long dagger, and struck at the thief. The latter dropped Blanche, and closed with his assailant. Yvonne made a dart at the child, but the soldiers rushed between, and swept her aside. Rosamunde caught her hand, and by a miracle they found themselves outside the human maelstrom whirling around the Moor. Enid and Margot huddled against them. They ran back to the top step and watched the seething and yelling crowd at their feet. They saw men and women swaying this way and that upon the edge of the circle, striving to reach its center, blindly, not knowing why they fought except that others were fighting. And the three women tried to find the place where Sidi had stood a moment since. But they only saw men pushing and tearing, and caught a glimpse of something white buffeted this way and that, and which might have been the Moor's white robes. There had also been a child. What of Blanche of Verlay?

In this moment of their horror Bertrand came into the square, followed by Bûchon and Gaston. He saw Rosamunde on the steps, and perceiving an immediate need of interference, rode into the crowd, the other two following.

The horses plunged and reared. The people, taken by surprise, began to scatter. These formed the outer fringe of the trouble, and they yielded easily to such persuasion. Bertrand pursued his way unconcernedly, while Bûchon, ignorant of what awaited him, made his own path. Meanwhile, Gaston had seen Margot, and was shouting her name. Rosamunde heard, saw the three horsemen, could not recognize them behind their hoods, but suddenly knew her heart beating to another measure than fear. In two minutes Bertrand had swept Verlay's men aside, and sat looking down at what they had left

upon the ground. Sidi the Moor, torn and bleeding, but still alive, and a child who was dead.

A butterfly mangled in the storm of men's blind fury! She lay in a crumpled heap. Life had been crushed out of her, but the little face was spared. It lay in the dust, white and smooth, framed in its golden curls. The blue eyes stared up into the blue heaven, and held a great wonder, as if amazement at this cruelty had gripped her before she died. The men who had killed her muttered sullenly behind the horses. Bertrand looked from the Moor to where Rosamunde stood on the cathedral steps, then round upon the soldiers.

"A brave business!" said he. "Why have you killed the maid?"

No one answered. Sidi crawled to the child, and put his hand on her heart.

"Dead," he said, then staggered to his feet, and flung out his hands towards the crowd. "May swine defile your graves," he called, and spat in the nearest face.

The men raged at the insult, but the horses checked the rush. Then Enid came slowly down the steps, and knelt beside the dead child. Rosamunde followed, and stood by Black King. She knew both horse and rider now, and looking up found the blue eyes in the shadow of the hood.

"You!" she murmured.

"Myself!"

"Why?"

Folly to ask when she knew. He looked at her, and life sprang afresh into each face. Then both turned from self to the outer world.

Bûchon, who had been busy with the crowd, now sat his horse like one petrified, staring at Enid and the dead

child. Slowly Enid lifted her eyes to his. Grief for his grief twisted her face awry.

"Bûchon!" she muttered. "Dear man, will you be brave now?"

He dismounted as if lead weighted his limbs, and throwing back his hood, looked upon his daughter.

Silence fell on the group. The crowd had dwindled. The soldiers slunk away. Only Verlay's two or three men remained, pointing at Bûchon, and muttering between themselves. Gaston swung himself off his horse and called softly to Margot, who ran to him gladly. Yvonne, in her page's dress, stayed alone on the steps, looking this way and that with bright, quick glances. Then Bertrand also dismounted, giving his horse to Gaston, and moved close to Bûchon.

"Bûchon," said he.

The man looked at him with dulled eyes.

"She is dead, lord."

"She is with her mother, friend."

"Ay, but I once hoped she might stay a while with me."

And here lay his hope, shattered. Enid had risen to her feet, and was watching him. Now she made an imploring gesture to Bertrand. He put his hand on Bûchon's shoulder.

"Friend!"

The touch, the word brought Bûchon up from hell. The pity in his master's eyes, the compassion on Rosamunde's face and Enid's tears softened the torture of his soul. But the restraint he put upon himself made his speech nearly inaudible.

"I was a fool. Rodolphe of Verlay ever sealed his work. How did she come here?"

Enid told him. Rosamunde stood at Bertrand's side.

Now Verlay's men were gone. Yvonne watching from the steps saw a monk leave the gates of the Bishop of Montpellier's palace, which stood opposite, and come across the almost deserted square towards the group.

When the story was told, Bûchon looked at Sidi-el-Mara.

"You were kind to her. My tongue never had cause to bless before. It cannot come at such words——"

"She was the light of my house. Now am I desolate, robbed, and wounded——" He pointed to his tattered robes, to his left arm hanging limply at his side, then bowed his head submissively. "There is one God, and Mahmoud is his prophet."

Yvonne came springing down the steps and caught Rosamunde's arm.

"Let Count Bertrand go while he may. Alfor the monk has seen him."

They all turned. Alfor stood twenty yards away. He had recognized Bûchon, and who but Bûchon's master rode Black King? Bertrand of Crein, here in Montpellier? And with the lady Rosamunde!

The monk cursed, then laughed, and fled away to warn Bishop Foulquet, who had reached Montpellier that morning. He vanished through the palace gates as Bertrand swung into the saddle.

"Run to earth," laughed Bertrand. Then he stooped to Rosamunde. "Let me carry you to Béziers. I doubt your safety here."

To ride with him, in the shelter of his arms! Oh, fool, who had claimed a conquest with one victory alone! But she found strength to steady her voice.

"I am safe enough, and my lord will fetch me tomorrow. Now go, for Christ's sake—ah, go, go, for mine."

The palace gates had opened. Men came pouring out. Gaston leaped on his horse. Bûchon hesitated, looking at his dead. But Enid shook him violently.

"Go!" she cried, "leave the child to me for Christian burial. Will you hinder the count in his danger?"

She could have used no better spur to rouse him. He knelt, kissed his daughter's face, then sprang onto his horse.

"It has been heaven to see you, to hear your voice, to breathe the air you breathe," said Bertrand to Rosamunde. "Now farewell for a time."

She saw him shake the hood from his face, saw him turn in the saddle to fling a taunt at the bishop's men, heard his reckless laugh, then he was gone with the wolves baying after him, and leaving the music of his voice singing in her heart.

"St. Julian keep him safe," said Yvonne, whose eyes shone. "Oh, a proper man and worth—why more than one twinge of conscience."

She shot a glance at Rosamunde, then turned briskly to the Moor.

"Go home, Sidi, and salve your wounds. And you, lady, bide here. I will send a litter to bring little Blanche to your house."

She poised a moment over the quiet figure. "Red wine of life. Ay, but the cork was drawn over soon for you. Poor heart! you had not yet throbbed."

She ran off. Sidi looked down upon the child he had loved.

"Farewell," he said, "my white pearl of the west. As the warmth of a sunbeam, as the silver of a moonbeam, you lit my life. Lo, the stalk of a flower is cut, the bloom has fallen. My heart is heavy for the empty garden of my hopes."

His head sank upon his breast, then with a gesture replete with the mystic resignation of the Orient, he took leave of Rosamunde and went his way. Presently the litter came, and Blanche of Verlay went home with Enid to be clothed in white, and decked with flowers, and to have mass sung for her soul, and prayers to wing it to her mother. Surely these two were happy now, who had suffered such torment in life, as women and children suffered in medieval times, writhing steps in the ladder of the world's upward struggle from bestial ignorance.

Later on in the day a strange man brought a message to Rosamunde's house. Cryptic enough. "St. Julian saved his own." Yet sufficient to ease her fear. And she thanked heaven and blessed Yvonne who had served her.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE next day Roger of Béziers came to Montpellier with Hubert of Gervaudan and Philippe of Albret to treat if possible with the enemy. Did he really hope for success? The advice to Raymond, the energies spent in fortifying Béziers and Carcassonne point to his inward certainty of failure. Yet as a last duty to the welfare of his people, he made the appeal.

The three southern gentlemen carried themselves with brave dignity before the Abbot of abbots. But from the first all three realized the futility of their errand. For Roger would not deliver up his heretic subjects to Rome's mercy, and Arnaud would not yield one jot of this demand.

"So much for your faith," he sneered. "Well may Holy Writ be paraphrased, and the sons of the Church say, 'Put not your faith in princes—of Provence.'"

Roger clapped his hand to his sword.

"That proverb shall drive home, steel-pointed, my lord abbot."

"Ah," said Arnaud, exulting, "do your protestations change so quickly into threats?"

"Scarcely quicker than the threats into fulfillment, please heaven," flamed the viscount.

"What," he cried. "You will not listen to my words, will deny my honor! And why? Because after Ray-

mond of Toulouse I am the most powerful man in the country. Not for nothing am I overlord of Béziers, of Albi, and of Carcassonne. Rome covets my downfall. By God, you venal priests, compass it if you dare. And if you can," he drew a long breath, and flashed his glance from face to face, "if you can, why, then, Christ help your loss that day."

And with this defiance he and his friends departed. But Arnaud smiled, and bidding Bishop Foulquet and Pierre of Vaux-Cernay to his presence, waited for what must follow.

It came quickly in the furious return of Hubert de Gervaudan. Scant ceremony did he use in dashing aside the sentry at the door, and striding up to the calm, inflexible abbot.

"Treachery!" he cried, "most foul treachery! Where is my wife?"

"In the care of the Church," said Arnaud.

"You broke into my house like a thief—your men seized my wife. Now yield her——" He broke off before the cold, white smile on the abbot's face, and clutched his sword.

"To what persuasion?" asked Arnaud blandly.

"This," said Hubert, flashing out his sword, but Foulquet uttered a cry which brought an officer and a dozen soldiers into the room. They surrounded the count. For a moment he was minded to resist, then prudence leaped swiftly to his brain, warning him that wisdom and not blind rage must serve him here. He lowered his sword. The abbot made a sign and the soldiers fell back.

"My lord count," said Arnaud, "you will do well to curb your wrath and listen to our terms. Lady Rosamunde is our hostage for Bertrand de Crein. Her release lies with the Viscount of Béziers."

Here was a trap most daintily baited. Hubert understood at once.

"So," he said, "I am to buy my wife's safety with my friend's life."

Then Foulquet thrust his harsh countenance forward. "Which friend is your wife's lover?" he snarled.

A flush rose into the count's fine face, and he turned a look of indescribable contempt upon the bishop. "You *thing,*" he said in calm, measured tones, "you foul leprous blot upon God's fair earth. Now if you were a man you should answer for that lie."

A white flame seemed to shimmer over Arnaud's face, but he motioned the furious bishop to silence.

"Will you so insult the Church's anointed apostle?" he asked in dangerous tones.

"I will defend my wife's honor against a scurrilous tongue," said Hubert. He spoke quietly, and his face was quiet save for the quick throbbing of his temples. He made a fine picture of a knightly gentleman as he stood alone before his enemies with the silver hair framing his keen, quick face, and his muscular hands gripping the hilt of his sword upon which he leaned, and which for all his sixty years he could still wield to deadly purpose.

Wrinkles might show around his eyes, but could not dim the light of the fine soul within, nor mar the dignity of his eagle face. An old man but a great man, and with a subtle brain to help his physical vigor. Yet it seemed that now he had to deal with brains versed in more deadly cunning than he dreamed of.

"The question uppermost," said Arnaud, bending forward in his chair, "is not of Lady Rosamunde's honor, but of her welfare. Do you take my message to Béziers?"

Then Hubert's mind began to work, and in its toil met Dread with a grim jeer upon her face. For this is what had happened. He and Roger had parted at the palace door, Roger to ride immediately to Béziers, himself to hasten to his house and order the swift departure of the household.

He had found it in disorder, Rosamunde and the menservants gone, and Enid hysterical through alarm for her mistress. She could only say that the men had been overwhelmed by the abbot's soldiers, and taken away with the countess, who had received no harm.

Now what should a true man do? Bertrand was not only his friend, he was a very tower of strength to Provence. Roger of Béziers had given the garrison of that town into his hands. There was not a man his equal in military genius to replace him. Hubert de Gervaudan knew that without him the town might well fall. And if Béziers fell, then heaven help Provence and the man who had betrayed her!

And that man himself! Sweat broke out on his face, his hands trembled. For if he did not take the message to Béziers, if Bertrand were kept in ignorance of Rosamunde's danger, why, then, there could be no question of Provence losing his service. Whereas, if he told the truth, what power in the world would prevent Bertrand from paying the price of Rosamunde's safety?

Such thoughts raced swiftly through his mind, while the soldiers stood impassively around him, and Arnaud and Foulquet watched him as cats watch a mouse. All three churchmen wore military costume, and Arnaud was very splendid indeed in his chain mail of burnished silver with its velvet surcoat of purple and gold, and the great ruby cross flaming on his breast. His white fingers

caressed it now as he gazed upon Hubert, reading with marvelous acumen the working of his mind.

"What of my wife if I do not ransom her?" asked Hubert.

"Why, as a heretic——" began Arnaud.

Hubert started. "Heretic! No lady is a more faithful, zealous Catholic."

"Heretic," said Foulquet. "Did she not herself tell me it was difficult to find an honest priest? And did she not reject the sacrament of confession although urged to it by that blessed saint, Dominic himself?"

Pierre de Vaux-Cernay clasped his hands.

"Oh, heresy most foul," he ejaculated.

"Oh, lie most damnable," retorted Hubert stoutly, but inwardly he trembled with a sudden and very cold fear. Innocent people had been burned for a lesser charge of heresy than this. Could he abandon Rosamunde to such a doom? Yet her death might save a thousand women's lives.

"You torture me," he said with cold dignity. "You would make of me my wife's butcher or my country's betrayer. And this to serve a private vengeance against a gentleman who is guiltless of the foul charge you bring against him. You know that well, but this renegade and traitor here, this Foulquet, who has sold his soul to the devil and his country to her enemies, has vowed Count Bertrand's destruction, and will compass it by threats against a woman. Such subtle cruelty becomes your reputation and his, my lord abbot, but by the death of Christ your reputation befouls the Church you serve."

The monk Pierre interposed his shrill whine again.

"Heretics are beasts of prey, to be slain wherever they are found."

Hubert turned from him in contempt. "I do not deal with jackals. Now Arnaud of Armouri, why not send your own messenger to Béziers? I am not minded to do this work."

"Can you ask?" said Arnaud with his fine, cold smile. "How should my messenger get through a hostile country in safety, and how should an armed force be allowed to pass your strong places? I have no time to spare for such delay as must ensue in many combats. And yet again, would Bertrand de Crein believe *my* herald? Rather would he perceive a trap and refuse the bait. No, sir count, in this my difficulty I find no better messenger than yourself, who can travel unmolested, and whose story Count Bertrand must accept. Are you not the lady's husband?"

The man was inhuman in his venom. One could see the red lust of cruelty shining in the eyes he bent upon Hubert. The count's hands twitched about the sword hilt, yet for his wife's sake and for Provence he restrained the impulse to spring upon Arnaud, and pierce him through the heart.

"You make war with dirty weapons, lord abbot," he said scornfully. "Why will you not roll your hosts upon Béziers and take Count Bertrand, if you may, in honest warfare instead of snaring him with a lady's danger? A sorry piece of work indeed, my lords. Can Rome soil her hands with such a coward's trick?"

"Enough!" answered Arnaud imperiously. "We will listen no more to shameless insults against the Church. Rome has sworn to avenge the sainted Castelnau's murder. Rome will work her way upon the murderer, and men are not easily seized in the tumult of battle. I, for one, take no risks. Now, sir, your answer. Will you go to Béziers?"

This way and that did Hubert of Gervaudan cast his thoughts to find an answer to his doubt.

"Give me time," he said hoarsely. "This is no light thing you ask."

"Why waste your time? The matter is plain. If you refuse to be our messenger, your wife will die in the hour, and not easily."

The sweat poured down Hubert's face.

"And if I take it?"

"Then I will allow proper time for your going and Crein's arrival. Béziers lies fifty miles hence, and it now wants half an hour to noon. You shall have until sunset to-morrow. And if you trick me, then I regret, but Lady Rosamunde must pay for your treachery. Think well."

"Add this to reflection," sneered Foulquet, "that Brother Alfor is appointed your wife's confessor."

Another shaft to pierce the armor of stern duty. He knew from Rosamunde what part the black monk had played in her life. Death, it seemed, was the least evil she might expect.

Heretic was Hubert de Gervaudan, discarding symbols, rejecting the fetish of the Church, but true enough to the principle lying behind the tyranny and superstition men had reared upon it—the divine response to the soul who called upon its God.

Here lay his faith, and in that moment of awful doubt he sent up his dumb prayer to heaven: "God, Who art the wisdom within me, show me what to do!" he prayed with all his strength, even more with a touch of imperious demand, as of a man who knows his rights and will have them. No saints to intercede, no Virgin divine to bear his plea, but straight to the bosom of the great Force which ordains all things in heaven and earth,

winged his supplication. In that moment he became lost to his surroundings, the figures of the abbot and the others faded from consciousness. He saw nothing, knew nothing of things temporal. He was alone with God. Like Jacob of old, he wrestled with God and would not suffer Him to go.

Those in the room watched him curiously. No churchman, hide-bound in sacerdotal doctrine, held by vain ceremony and symbols, could have understood the attitude of his soul, but all saw the iron concentration fall like a mask upon the upturned face with its closed lids, and as the moments passed, held their breath as if in the presence of something they did not understand—more, of something they feared. For as they looked they saw the rigidity of his face soften, yet he did not open his eyes. They beheld him as in a trance, yet with a great light as from some inward glow, shining upon his face. And the superstitious soldiers drew back and muttered among themselves that he might be gazing upon the Mother of Heaven herself, and the priests frowned yet could not speak. Something more vital than their power chained them to silence, and they were strangely uneasy.

Then at last he opened quiet eyes upon the abbot, and there was a gleam behind their calm.

"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation," he murmured to himself. Arnaud did not catch the words, but for some inexplicable reason doubt suddenly came upon him.

"Well, sir, well?" he cried sharply.

"I will take the message," answered Hubert.

A flash of triumph shot across the abbot's face. He rose to his feet. "Remember, that for any treachery, your wife will pay."

"I remember. May I see my lady?"

"No," came the blunt refusal, "and you shall have an escort to bring you safely outside the city—where you may meditate a rescue, bearing always due regard to the time at your disposal," he added with a crafty smile.

But the count only bowed and drew aside as the great prelate and his two friends moved to the door.

"Wait here," said Arnaud to the officer. "Your orders shall be delivered shortly."

Then he went, but suddenly checked in his walk and turned to Foulquet.

"Good bishop, did you mark his face? One might think that heaven had wrought a miracle, and shown him a way through this net whose meshes we have sewn up."

"He would indeed need heaven's help for that," said Foulquet grimly.

"And such is not bestowed on heretics," added Pierre with pious fervor.

Perhaps heaven holds wider views of heresy, or why did Foulquet leave the abbot without learning the name of the knight who should escort Count Hubert beyond the gates, and that knight chance to be one Hugo of Maulever in the service of a very great northern lord, no other in fact than Guy de Beaufoy, he who had married the lady of Ponthieu!

Now when Hugo told his lord that the abbot had requisitioned his service to take Count Hubert of Gervaudan beyond the walls of Montpellier, Count Guy—for he was count now—knit his brows.

"Gervaudan!" he repeated. "Why is the name familiar?"

That Hugo could not tell him, but he vouchsafed some gossip repeated in the guard room of the palace. The count's lady was prisoner to His Holiness the abbot—held

a hostage for a certain knight, Count Bertrand de Crein.

Guy de Beaufoy leaped to his feet.

"*Par le sang Dieu,* Bertrand de Crein! He escorted the Lady Rosamunde de Tracey, who was to wed this Hubert of Gervaudan. And she is a prisoner and hostage for De Crein! Now I would like to read this riddle."

He thought for a moment. "Hugo, I will take your place, but you shall not inform the abbot. Now what is needed? You wear the red and purple of Beaufoy, but your baldrick carries the device of Maulever. Quick, give it to me. Now your helm, whose plumes are not so rich. The visor down, so, and we are much of a build. Now by your allegiance do not move from here until my return, nor tell any one where I have gone. There is a debt to pay."

He hurried away, leaving an astonished squire behind. But Hugo was a cautious soul, and men did not lightly disobey Count Guy's commands, so he remained tranquil, and to all who came demanding Beaufoy he displayed bland ignorance of that gentleman's movements.

Meanwhile, Guy was riding beside Hubert of Gervaudan towards the southern gate. He had spoken no word so far, not deeming it prudent to be seen in converse with his prisoner, and Hubert also rode in silence with that strange peaceful look still upon his face. But as they were passing his own house, he awoke from his reverie.

"Sir knight, when they took my lady, her woman and her woman's little daughter were left behind. They are unprotected and I can no longer shield them. If in your great courtesy you could place them in safety, I should be your debtor for eternal gratitude."

"Are they within?" asked Guy.

"They should be. I bade them wait my coming."

De Beaufoy halted the company, and sent two of his men into the house. Presently they returned declaring it was empty of men, women and children alike.

"Lord, I believe. Help Thou mine unbelief," said Hubert steadily, and rode on, and the soldiers who had heard marvelled. For did not the priests declare that no man of Languedoc was Christian, yet here at least went one who prayed.

They passed through the city gates, and on about a mile into the country beyond. Not a soul was in sight. The fields were untilled, the vines neglected, the olives hung overripe upon the trees. Terror stalked throughout the land, and people had fled before the muttering of the storm into the shelter of the fortified towns and castles.

Count Guy bade his men wait and himself moved out of earshot with Hubert, finally stopping beyond a clump of gray rock which hid them from view.

"Do we part here?" asked Hubert gravely.

"Presently," said Guy. "First I would inform you, my lord, that I have the honor to be vastly indebted to Count Bertrand of Crein."

Hubert looked at him attentively, scarcely amazed, rather like a man receiving something he had expected.

"Well, sir?"

"I owe him my wife and my existence. He stood between us and death, and I like not the burden of a debt."

"Who may you be?" asked Hubert quietly, yet with a dawning excitement in his eyes.

"Guy, Count of Beaufoy, at your service, once a plain knight, but I married the widow of Ponthieu, and her fief of Vaucenne became mine. Then warfare here and

there"—he waved a light hand—"gave me added wealth. Finally, her kinsman and owner of Ponthieu after the baron, came to try issues with me, and got killed for his pains. Whereby, in default of heirs the barony of Ponthieu returned to my wife. Finally, our lord, the king, ennobled me for services rendered against the English, and here you have me, Count of Beaufoy, and a power in the north, but very much at the service of Bertrand de Crein in the south. Also, I have a grudge against Bishop Foulquet."

"Deus laudamus te," said Hubert, and covered his eyes with his hands.

Guy looked at him curiously.

"Do heretics pray?" asked he.

"Ay," said Hubert, "and give thanks for mercy received. But now, sir, will you hear my story?"

Beaufoy's face grew black as he listened. At the end he swore a mighty oath. "Such knavery may suit a priest, but not a gentleman. The north has her chivalry, sir count. Now if Burgundy and Nevers or Aquitaine knew of this, His Holiness the abbot might see their men turn homeward to-morrow."

"Will you tell them?"

Count Guy considered; then, "No," he said frankly. "We are out to win too much, and would not return empty-handed. But we will make war as gentlemen, and your lady shall not suffer."

"That is all I ask."

"And I must devise a way. How long have you?"

"Until sunset to-morrow."

Again Beaufoy looked at him with curiosity.

"And you were prepared to lose your friend?"

"God forbid."

"You had some plan of rescue?"

"None!"

"Then in the devil's name——"

"Thus it happened," said Count Hubert. "I am an old man, and in my life have been in many hard places, and have had difficult problems to solve. Yet the worst was reserved for to-day, when I had to choose between my country's need and my wife's torture and death. This way and that I sought, but could find no deliverance. Then in my extremity I turned to God"—he paused and bowed his head before continuing—"and as I prayed a great peace fell upon me, and I lost consciousness of self, and became, as it were, the mouthpiece of another who had no fear. And I knew that the path was smoothed for me. So, speaking by this other voice, I promised to ride to Béziers and came forth to meet you and God's great mercy. Amen."

He spoke quite simply and with only the light in his eyes to testify to the exultation of his spirit. Guy of Beaufoy sat his horse in amazement before such a tale from heretic lips.

"And they told us men denied God in the south!" he reflected, "yet here goes a better Christian than myself, and I take the Cross against him." He glanced at the red cross flaming on his breast. "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel," he muttered.

"You shall ride to Béziers indeed, with your lady safe beside you," he said earnestly. "And when you come to Count Bertrand I pray you tell him how Guy of Beaufoy rejoiced to pay his debt. Now, have you friends at hand?"

"The Baron of Tarn should be in his castle a mile from here," said Hubert.

"Then ride to him and ask the loan of two of his swiftest horses. Return to this place and await our

coming. Now I must go before my men grow curious. Farewell, my lord."

"Farewell," answered Hubert. "Heaven reward your help to me and mine."

Then Guy of Beaufoy rode back to Montpellier, and Hubert of Gervaudan took the road to Tarn.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE Abbot of abbots had made his plans with due regard to main facts as he knew them. But how many unknown streams go to swell a river's flood, and how many unknown threads form the visible pattern of men's existence! In this case of Rosamunde of Gervaudan, Arnaud saw her only as his safe prisoner. He ignored the thread worked in her life by Guy of Beaufoy, and Ermengarde his wife; went also in serene ignorance of Etienne of Ronais and of his fair-haired page. Yet when the news of Lady Rosamunde's abduction filtered through the town, Yvonne slipped quietly, without a word to hint her errand, from Etienne's house to that of Gervaudan.

The door stood open, and an ominous silence brooded over the place. She ran lightly within, but did not meet a soul, while the disorder of trampled rushes, overturned furniture and broken glass spoke eloquently of a struggle.

"H'm!" said the nun in the boy's dress, "the wolves have got her. What will Count Bertrand say?"

She swayed lightly as she thought. It seemed impossible for this elfin creature to remain quiet.

"Now," she reflected, "Lady Rosamunde cannot remain in the abbot's clutches, and Count Bertrand must be warned. The first shall be my business, Etienne shall compass the second. He must ride at once."

Making to leave the house, she met Enid and Margot

on the threshold. Enid gave a screech at the sight of her.

"God have mercy, young sir. Will you burn us, too?" she cried.

"Hush!" said Yvonne, and drew them quickly into the house, shutting the door.

A sob burst from Enid's lips. Margot, also, began to whimper, and words were drowned in weeping.

Yvonne had small patience with their grief. Life was too short for tears, and what help did they ever bring?

"Cease your folly," she said sharply. "We want our wits a-fire, not drowned in murky water. Now tell me the story."

Enid was taken aback by the peremptory manner of this pert boy, but recognizing, perhaps, his wisdom, she stopped crying, and told how the abbot's men had seized her lady and taken the servants as prisoners. "Margot and I were at the market," she added, "or should have been haled off likewise, I make small doubt. And when my lord came back and found his lady gone, he was like a man demented, and rushed off without a word to me. Indeed, had he spoken I'd not ha' heard, being crazed with fear."

"A right, useful soul you are," muttered Yvonne; then aloud: "And what then, woman?"

"Why, when they was all gone, the place grew so lonesome and I so crimped with fright that I took Margot into the streets for company like, but indeed the devil is loose to-day, for the people go with scared faces. And oh, young sir, they do say Montpellier will be sacked to-night."

"Maybe, but you shall be riding to Béziers then. Now follow me."

This page was her lady's friend, and the promise was

sufficient to send Enid into the streets again. Clutching Margot tightly, she hastened at Yvonne's heels. The city wore a strange aspect. Every shop was shuttered, the usual busy flow of life was checked. The sun shone in the blue sky as of old, the blue sea lapped the city walls, but a gray cloud of fear hung between Montpellier and the glory of the firmament. The market-place was empty, the square deserted. No gaily clad men and women chattered on the cathedral steps, no merchants, smiling and prosperous, passed to and from their warehouses. The Arab doctors, in their long, white, flowing robes, were missing from the school of medicine. Missing the gay tinkle of yellow coins round smooth, dusky throats as wealthy Saracen beauties passed in their litters to the baths, missing the brilliant escort of their Provençal lords, with plumes floating from jeweled caps and all the colors of the rainbow rioting in their mantles and tunics, while the horses they rode were the pick of the Arab strain, and their silver and golden trappings flashed a million points of light in the shimmer of the sun.

No dark-eyed girls in red and yellow draperies twisted tightly about their graceful forms, clustered to-day round the fountains, with their baskets of purple grapes and luscious Smyrna figs, no children played upon the quays. No lute rippled the air with snatches of music, no song fell upon the ear. All that was bright and gay and prosperous had vanished before the motley soldiery now in possession of Montpellier.

Bands of these men passed to and fro, swaggering with the pride of conquerors. Count Raymond's surrender and Arragon's allegiance had spared Montpellier the horrors of a sack, but private looting might well be encompassed when night fell, and the scum of Europe

which swelled the army of the crusaders would not easily be restrained.

Truly, a more villainous set of countenances would be hard to imagine than many of those which leered among the more reputable men-at-arms and the mass of religious and secular volunteers.

These last were for the most part decent-looking bodies, and not yet stamped with the ferocity which marked them later on.

But those other evil faces filled Enid with horror. Grimy with dirt, dark with ignorance, beasts rather than men, half-naked and without shoes and stockings, these villains went by the name of *ribauds* or *truands,* and there were fifteen thousand of them in Arnaud's army. Fifteen thousand savages to be let loose upon the civilization of Provence.

Two of them came shouldering a way down the narrow street accompanied by three or four creatures who had been women once. All were drunk and shouting ribald songs. The foremost man caught sight of Enid, and loosening his hold of one of the women, made a clutch at her. She screamed as he touched her, and the other women hit at her savagely, missed her, tripped, and in falling dragged the man to the ground.

A roar of laughter greeted the tumble.

"Qui trop embrasse mal estraint," jeered the crowd, and Enid and Yvonne, profiting by this diversion, ran speedily with Margot down a side street, and gained the house where Etienne of Ronais lodged within a stone's throw of the Tour de la Babotte, the main tower of the city's fortifications.

And therefore it happened that Enid saw her master, Count Hubert of Gervaudan, ride a prisoner through the gates. He did not mark her as he went by, but when

the last soldier vanished beyond the walls, a great sob burst from the faithful creature.

"Oh, my lord and my lady!" she wailed. "Saints be merciful to us all."

"Hush!" said Yvonne. "Will you drag every eye upon you? Come now! Here is the house!" and she knocked sharply upon the door.

When it opened she hurried Enid and the child into a small room at the back, and then went in search of Etienne, to whom she unfolded her tale. He listened in some perplexity.

As one of Queen Marie's household, he had nothing to fear from the crusaders, and designed to remain quietly in Montpellier, leaving conflict to those who sought it. He was not cast in a superlatively heroic mold, although he could fight with any man; moreover, he was a good Catholic in spite of the sin concerning Yvonne, and held heretics in sincere abhorrence. And again, he had not yet seen the butchery of his countrymen which was to rouse the flame of patriotism in Provence in Catholic and heretic alike.

Therefore, he viewed with no great pleasure the prospect of running into considerable danger to save people who were both heretics and strangers.

For Yvonne was insisting that Enid and Margot should travel forthwith to Béziers under the escort of his cousin, Godfrey of Cern, a devoted adherent of Viscount Roger, and who with his family was quitting Montpellier while the road lay open. And Etienne, she said, must outstrip them on the way, riding hot speed to Béziers to inform Count Bertrand of his lady's plight.

"And why shall I do this for a stranger?" asked Etienne, ill-pleased.

"For two reasons. You will help a helpless lady

and"—she laughed into his eyes—"you shall please me."

He caught her small hand.

"In that service I would die, as you know well. But there is no talk of your riding with me."

She had tossed her cap off, and her golden curls shook all round her wonderful little face.

"I stay here."

"No, by God! In this den of priests!"

"Yes, even in the lion's den, with Bishop Foulquet gnashing his teeth as I escape him—so!"

She fluttered round the room in a wonderful elusive movement most fascinating to watch. But Etienne only frowned.

"Now, by our love, you shall not be so mad," he declared. "What will you do alone in Montpellier?"

"Open Lady Rosamunde's prison, and bring her safely without the city, where you and Count Bertrand shall meet us."

"How?" He scoffed to hide his rising fear, for this love of his was a strange creature full of caprice, and not easily turned aside from her purpose. Moreover, he worshipped her with that fierce, unreasoning passion which makes a man a woman's slave.

"I am not sure yet," said Yvonne, "but I shall find a way."

He rose to his feet, and set his face.

"I forbid it," he said harshly.

She laughed. "I am not your wife."

"You are my love." He strode forward and caught the little figure in its boyish hose and tunic in his arms. "You are my life! Will you slay me for these people who are strangers?"

She lay still in his embrace, and fixed her strange burning eyes upon his face.

"What is life, Etienne?"

"Love," and he kissed her lips.

"Ay, love, indeed! God wot I have given you that, and drunk it at your hands. But life is also movement, the rush of blood quick and hot in the veins, the throb of suspense, the spasm of delight when face to face with danger—— Life! When do we ever live so well as in the moment which may bring death?"

"Heaven save me from such delight in you," he said, but Yvonne shook her curls.

"Not so do I pray. Let me die before the sap of youth runs dry. Ah, Etienne, did I ever love you better than when we raced the archbishop's men from Sens, when but a hairbreadth lay between me and death! Love of my life, that day at least we *lived*."

A strange exultation rang in her voice, her eyes flamed with the excitement conjured by memory, but Etienne smiled sadly.

"Have I tried to chain a will o' the wisp?"

"A flame," she rejoined, "and you must feed it lest it grow pale and die."

He loosened his arms and stared at her with a frightened look.

"Is it a threat?"

She smiled mysteriously. "I will burn for you, Etienne, but I must choose my own fuel."

"Then you will not give up this madness?"

She drew a long breath and softly clapped her hands. "Say, rather, this delight. To match my wits against the abbot and to win!"

"What is your plan?"

He was beaten. The mere idea of losing her had killed all opposition.

Now Yvonne, smiling, came back to his side.

"Enid and Margot shall ride at once, and you shall outspeed them to Béziers."

"Enid and Margot shall ride, indeed, but I do not leave you. Another messenger must be found for Béziers."

Herein he was adamant, and after a little reflection Yvonne yielded.

"Pay well for an honest man," she said. "There is much at stake. Bid him tell Count Bertrand to bring soldiers with him for our need."

"Your plan," said Etienne impatiently, "your plan for putting our necks in this noose and withdrawing them uncramped."

"In good time. Never frown, love, but hasten your cousin's departure, while I go and tell this woman she is saved."

Etienne obeyed in unhappy mood, and Yvonne returned to Enid, whom she found leaning through an unglazed window.

"Margot, child, look yonder!" she exclaimed. "Do you mind the lady riding by so proud with all that train of folk behind?"

She pulled the child to the window, and Yvonne, looking over her head into the street, saw a lady, most magnificently attired in red and purple, mounted upon a snow white horse, and pacing slowly along, followed by a glittering retinue of knights.

Enid stared at her, shaking in her excitement.

"Who is it, Margot? Oh, child, surely I'm not dreaming."

"Why, mother, 'tis the lady of Ponthieu, her whose lord was so cruel——" shivered Margot.

"Ay, and who fled with the Sieur of Beaufoy. And do you mind, child, how Count Bertrand would not

suffer them to be slain? The holy Bishop Foulquet himself had to yield."

"What is that?" said Yvonne sharply. "Tell me this tale."

Nothing loth, Enid poured it forth. "And Count Bertrand stood between them and death if ever a man did," she concluded.

"Oh, good!" cried Yvonne, "oh, very good! 'Cast thy bread upon the waters.' Here be the finger of God, and the handwriting upon the wall."

She whirled out of the room, leaving Enid more amazed than ever at the oddness of this young boy. But little time had she to wonder. Sir Godfrey of Cern was already at the door with his troop. One man took Enid pillion behind him, a second swung Margot before him. So they departed from Montpellier some three hours after Viscount Roger had ridden thence.

Alone with Yvonne, Etienne once again demanded how she proposed to free the Lady Rosamunde.

"Thus. Etienne, do you not remember when the King of Arragon was prevailed upon to visit his wife, the lady of Montpellier, and how to avoid all risk of being seen by the people who hate him, he came into the palace by the hidden path from the Tour de la Babotte?"

Etienne nodded, with his eyes fixed more attentively upon her glowing, little face.

"And were you not one of those chosen by Queen Marie to bring the king in safety by this hidden passage? Therefore, you know the way, and the secret of the door in her own chamber."

"I know it well."

"And through you I also know it," she said excitedly. "Now the queen is your friend, and you shall go to her and ask her permission to bring two Saracen women

into her presence who have rare silks to show her. She will call her ladies, and if I know aught of women, they will crowd round, and pass the wares from hand to hand, and in that moment of preoccupation, the Saracens will have vanished. Do you like the picture?"

The risk was great, but the plan feasible with the right admixture of skill and courage, and Yvonne possessed both in plenty. Yet Etienne's heart ached with foreboding. A momentary vision of that small, bright figure in the clutches of an outraged Church unnerved him.

"Oh, give it up," he said hoarsely, "for the love of heaven."

But Yvonne frowned. "Again! why will you weary me so?"

"I am afraid—for you," was the miserable reply.

"I never loved a coward," said Yvonne, and hummed a little tune. By how light a thread he held her! Merely the weight of her own desire.

"Go on," he said in desperation, and she smiled once more.

"Well then, beloved," and she kissed her fingers and laid them on his mouth and laughed to see the swift glow in his eyes, "you shall await us in the passage, and bring us safely through the tower and beyond the wall, where three swift horses must be in readiness to take us to Béziers."

"But I have no mind for Béziers," cried Etienne exasperated. "You and I are safest in Montpellier."

"'Tis but a precaution in case our part in her flight becomes known. Then Béziers would be safer. What, another frown!" She smoothed it with a kiss. "Montpellier! Béziers! Tandaradei! Dear love, you and I being together would turn hell into our paradise."

He had no weapon to resist her witchery, and she knew it. Was she not Yvonne of the Beating Heart?

"Now all this is well enough," he said, "but how will you get the Lady Rosamunde through a locked door?"

"That was my difficulty, yet a frail woman is a match for a weak man, and I had it in my mind to coax her jailer."

A very imp of roguery looked from her eyes. Etienne laughed, and snatched her into his arms.

"You'd coax St. Anthony himself, but not Bishop Foulquet," he said.

"I would coax opportunity and pray to St. Julian, who helps all true lovers."

"Then these two are lovers! What of the lady's husband?"

"Truly, I do not know," said she with supreme indifference, "but these two loved long ago, and I showed the truth to Lady Rosamunde. But now listen! Our work is rendered easier by a discovery——" and she told him what Enid had said concerning the lady of Beaufoy.

"So it becomes plain that here may be other friends for her need, and my first care shall be to find their disposition towards the matter. Now a visit to Sidi, who will furnish such disguises as I want, and then, Etienne, I am for the palace."

"Then so am I," said Etienne, "and heaven send us a safe deliverance from our folly."

Meanwhile, their messenger spurred as rapidly as might be towards Béziers. Fifty miles lay between that city and Montpellier, and the way was not open. The road, such as it was, lay up and down rocky hills where a horse must needs pick his way. The Herault had to be forded, and beyond the river the ground rose sharply. He gallopped where he could, but the route was con-

gested by crowds of fugitives fleeing from the wrath to come. They poured from every small town and hamlet in the country side, towards Béziers, whose lord had made the town a place of refuge for the oppressed. A rider had to go slowly through such a throng. Darkness fell as he drew rein in Pézenas with an exhausted animal, and no possibility of covering the remaining twenty miles that night. But before dawn the next day he was in the saddle again, and the sun had not risen above the edge of the sea when he sped clattering through the streets of Béziers.

Half an hour later saw Bertrand of Crein, with Bûchon and Gaston and a dozen soldiers, galloping like madmen along the road to Montpellier.

CHAPTER XXXIII

SO much for the fruit of the passing hours at Béziers. What did they bring forth at Montpellier from the moment when Yvonne and her lover set forth at two in the afternoon for the castle?

Rosamunde was imprisoned in a small back room overhanging the rock upon which the castle stood, and which on this side fell sheer away into the river two hundred feet below. Her capture had been effected very quietly. The queen, who had placed the palace at the abbot's disposal, ignored it. The great feudal lords like Burgundy, Nevers, Damartin, and others were scattered in the town, and had no means of learning what Arnaud was at pains to keep from them.

Her kinsman, Aquitaine, was not yet come to Montpellier. Hence her position seemed friendless indeed, and her enemies went rejoicing, dreaming as little as she dreamed of the thread now changing the pattern which they had designed. A golden thread this of gratitude, running strongly over the dark background of hate which sent Bishop Foulquet to gloat upon Rosamunde's misery, and so kept him from knowledge of Hugo Maulever in the service of Guy of Beaufoy. For while the abbot went to order Count Hubert's escort, Foulquet hurried away to acquaint the lady of Gervaudan with that promise to ride to Béziers. In a refinement of cruelty he had already told her upon what terms hung her release.

Motionless bided Rosamunde of Gervaudan, praying as never she prayed in her life before, that Hubert would not buy her safety, that Bertrand would not learn the truth. And as she prayed, the door opened, and Foulquet troubled her solitude again.

"The count, your husband, rides to Béziers," he said.

She gazed at him, speechless.

"He has promised to tell Bertrand of Crein of your peril."

Rosamunde rose up from her seat, thrusting out her hands as if warding off a blow.

"I will not have it," she said hoarsely. "You must stop the count."

But Foulquet only smiled, and in his smile she read the triumph of his hatred. Her heart sank, and she turned aside to hide the torture of her soul. Yet she carried herself proudly. This priest, this inveterate enemy, should not rejoice in her anguish. The impulse to fling herself at his feet and pray for Bertrand's life died in its inception. Small thanks would Bertrand have given her to beg his life from Foulquet.

The bishop watched her carefully. He carried no particular dislike to her save for the love she bore Bertrand.

"*Amor omnia vincit improbus,*" he sneered. "So ardent a lover will not tarry in his coming."

If the insult stung her, she would not let him see it. The eyes she turned on him were weary rather than angry.

"Lord bishop," she said quietly, "when I was a child in my English convent, our good Father Ambrose taught me to love Christ and His Holy Mother, to worship the saints, and to revere the Church. He taught me more than that. He showed me that no wickedness whatever

practised by men could dim the real truth of God's goodness upon which the Church is founded. That teaching helps me to-day, my lord bishop."

Her clear eyes held his steadily for a moment, then she turned and walked to the window, nor looked his way again.

And Foulquet, Bishop of Toulouse, fanatic in his zeal, burning to avenge the wrongs suffered by the Church and unscrupulous in his methods of doing so, suddenly felt a check upon his rage, found himself humbled before this proud, cold woman who leaned upon a higher Christianity than his. The impression only lasted for a moment, but its influence took him from the room in silence, and once more Rosamunde was left alone to pray.

She thought very tenderly of the husband who had been fated to deal her this blow. She pictured his agony of mind, and could not quarrel with his decision.

Hubert had ridden to Béziers. Bertrand must die for her. Once long and long ago he had prayed for such a boon, and she had laughed, and told him he should serve her better living. Well had he served her, and well had he loved her, and now she brought him death, since of his coming there could be no doubt. Many had been the contests between him and Foulquet, and more often it was Bertrand who scored, but now Rome's foot trod upon them all, and the bishop had netted his enemy.

A strange thought that, incredible even. Bertrand would not let her die, that was certain, yet neither was he the man to yield lightly to such dastard tricks. He too could plot and plan, could parry a thrust and deliver the counter-blow. What if his quick brain found a way from this tangle!

Hope raised her head again, and again Rosamunde prayed.

Meanwhile, Guy of Beaufoy and Ermengarde, his wife, conferred together in the room consigned to their use in the palace. The lady of Beaufoy, like the lady Alix of Montfort, had elected to accompany her husband in his campaign, and maintained her position with great state and splendor as became the wife of one of the most powerful feudal lords of northern France.

The fierce, hot love of these two who had come through sin and bloodshed to happiness was softened now to a deep, abiding devotion which made their lives a heaven on earth, and which should bear them hand in hand to face what waited after death, and take such punishment as they might have earned. In the meantime, here was life and the joy thereof, and they owed both undoubtedly to Bertrand of Crein.

"Now," said Guy, "the Lady Rosamunde must be clear of the city by sunset. I promised so much to her husband."

"How?" asked Ermengarde.

"That we must quickly devise. It is now three; the sun sets at eight. They should have two hours of fair moonlight, afterward they must needs ride slowly. Even so, dawn to-morrow should see them within twenty miles of Béziers."

"So much for to-morrow, Guy. What of to-day?"

Guy marshalled the facts before her.

"Lady Rosamunde is in a room at the back of the palace, and on a level with the ramparts which end against the rock. A door opens from the ramparts into a passage running right and left. Twenty yards to the left is her room. The right-hand passage carries towards the main halls of the palace. One hundred yards separate this door on the ramparts from the Tour de la Babotte, which is under my command."

Ermengarde nodded. "I see. Once there, the rest is easy."

"Yes, but between her and that door are the abbot's own men. One stands outside her room and six guard the rampart door. We have to remove them."

"How?"

Count Guy laughed into his black beard.

"Why, Hugo of Maulever shall entertain them with a song, and think their praise too lukewarm. Trust him to find the quick road to a blow, and a dozen of our fellows shall spring to help him. The riot will bring me on the scene to quell the disorder, and I am master on this side the ramparts. Every man shall be haled to the tower, and I myself will guard the prisoner until such time as the abbot may be acquainted with the quarrel. By then Lady Rosamunde shall be riding with her husband towards Béziers."

"Ay," said the Lady Ermengarde, "but what of you, my lord, when your part in her escape is known?"

"Nothing! I can take ten thousand men back to France at a nod. Moreover, Burgundy has no great stomach for the work, and but very little would bring him home again with me. Arnaud knows it, and for all his pride he would not quarrel overloud at present. And harken, sweetheart, I will myself tell Bishop Foulquet."

The savage gleam in his eyes found a reflection in hers. Both were thinking of that scene in the forest when Ponthieu lay dead before them, and Foulquet would have slain Guy, but for Bertrand of Crein. And the woman remembered, also, the insults flung at her by the furious churchman, and the chivalry shown to her by Bertrand in that hour of her dire need.

"I would be present to see his face," she said, and

laughed in the same fashion as she laughed above her husband's dead body into Rosamunde's eyes. "That sore has rankled overlong."

"You shall heal it in helping Bertrand of Crein, who saved us for each other."

He flung his arm round her and kissed her, and the proud, fierce woman smiled, well content.

"I have my own debt to Lady Rosamunde," said she. "When I stood in the forest that day, Ponthieu dead at my feet, and you beside me with a sword all bloody from his killing, the bishop taunted me foully, calling me 'murderess' and 'adultress.' Murderess I was not, the fight being fair. Adultress I was for love of you." She laid her hands on his shoulders and looked into his eyes.

"Were it to do again, I'd do it, and thank heaven for my joy," she said, breathing very deeply, "neither did I ask any woman's pity. Yet, Guy, this same Lady Rosamunde, who knew me for what I was, looked deeper than my adultery, and in passing me, called heaven's blessing, not on a sinner, but on her 'sister-woman.' "

"Now heaven reward her sweet charity," said Guy.

"But never think I needed it," she said swiftly. "I had you, and needed nought in the world beside. Yet I would repay her graciousness very willingly."

"And so you shall. Now, let me go, dear lady, and send Hugo to his work."

But when the debonair Hugo of Maulever came to the rampart door, fate called check to Count Guy's move. The abbot's six men guarded it well enough, but a sentry cast in different mold kept watch and ward outside the lady's room. A tall, heavy man, black-haired, with deep eyes burning in a pale, shaven face, and a hungry, cruel mouth to disgrace it. He wore a soldier's dress, but car-

ried a heavy staff in place of the partisan, although a dagger gleamed on his breast.

Hugo, leaning against the doorpost in idle chatter with the guard, caught a glimpse of him pacing the passage.

"That is no soldier," said he.

"Devil a one," answered a man. "'Tis a Cistercian monk brought hither by Bishop Foulquet to keep close guard upon the lady lest the foul fiend himself should spirit her away."

"And a surly, ill-conditioned body, too," growled another. "Hag-ridden, I warrant me, for all his monkish vows."

"And what's his like doing at the door of a pretty woman?" sneered a third. "Got the key, too, he has. The bishop took it from me and gave it to him. I'm not to be trusted, I'm not—I, Jean Bonfoy, who am a tried soldier, and not—not——" he paused angrily for a simile.

"Not a masculine meaning obscured in a feminine frock," grinned Hugo. "Adieu, my masters, I may not stand idling longer."

He hurried back with his news to Count Guy, who frowned. For although his men might quarrel with the abbot's men, and come to no great harm, it would be another matter to deliberately assault a monk of Citeaux, which was Arnaud's own monastery, and this monk, moreover, a friend of Bishop Foulquet.

Now as they considered this difficulty, a messenger came to the door bringing word of a Saracen woman who desired speech with the count. Guy promptly committed her to the devil, and threatened the messenger with worse for the interruption.

"My lord," said the man quickly, "she bade me say she brings news from the lady of Gervaudan."

Guy and Ermengarde exchanged glances. What should a Saracen woman know of the lady of Gervaudan! Yet maybe here came a gleam of light upon their perplexity.

"Let her enter," said Guy shortly, and the woman was brought in, a figure clad in purple and yellow draperies, with a gauze veil shrouding her features. On her arm she carried a basket laden with silks and embroidered tissues.

Guy, staring at her keenly, received the glance of two burning eyes from behind the veil.

"Your business!" he said.

"A prayer from Enid, tirewoman to Lady Rosamunde of Gervaudan, that the lady of Beaufoy might remember a service rendered in the wood of Vaucenne."

Yvonne watched carefully the effect of her words. Until she was assured of these people's good will, it behooved her to move warily, for her own sake as well as for Rosamunde's.

Again count and countess looked at each other.

"Is it a snare?" whispered Ermengarde.

"Scarcely. Who should know of our desire to serve Lady Rosamunde?" He spoke harshly to the Saracen.

"Speak out, woman. What do you want?"

"I but carry the need of others. I am bidden to tell you that Lady Rosamunde of Gervaudan is a prisoner to the Abbot of abbots."

"How does this concern me?" fenced Guy.

"I do not know," riposted Yvonne.

Guy took a turn up the room, while Ermengarde watched the woman curiously, and Yvonne, behind her veil, looked from husband to wife, trying to read their faces.

"How shall I trust you?" said Guy at last.

"In what respect?" said Yvonne.

"Why, if I were minded to help the Lady Rosamunde, how should I be sure of your good faith."

"And if I had the same mind, what gage have I of yours?"

"Well, now," said Guy, "here is my reading of the riddle. I am resolved to help this lady, but you shall not go free to spread the news. You shall remain my prisoner for a while."

Then Yvonne laughed. "Content," she said, "now listen to my tale."

She repeated what she knew, but when she said that a messenger was riding to Béziers to warn Count Bertrand, Guy struck the arm of his chair.

"Mother of Heaven!" he shouted, "you have baited the trap. The abbot keeps Lady Rosamunde as hostage for the count."

"The greater need for haste," returned Yvonne unmoved. "Will you waste more time in doubt?"

She dropped the stilted accents of a foreigner, which she had assumed up to then, and spoke in her natural voice.

"You are no Saracen," cried Beaufoy.

"*Qui sait?* But the dress serves, and I've another here to fit the lady of Gervaudan."

"Will you not tell me your name?"

"I cannot. It is I and not my name that you must trust."

Then Ermengarde put in her word.

"She is right, Guy. After all, she is herself the hostage for her honesty."

He nodded. "True enough. Now woman, you had some plan. What is it?"

She explained and approval showed in the faces of lord and lady alike.

"By my faith, there are brains behind your veil," chuckled Guy.

"The prison door is still locked," said Ermengarde significantly, "and the monk is outside."

Yvonne pricked up her ears. "Monk!"

"Ay, an ill-conditioned fellow, so you say, Hugo," and Guy turned to the esquire, who had stood patiently aside since Yvonne's entrance.

"A black-browed, lowering dog," he confirmed.

"Brother Alfor, by all the stars in Mary's Crown," said Yvonne, " but he shall be my business. Can I come at this passage by any other door save the one in the rampart?"

"Through the palace," said Guy, "where my lady will bring you unquestioned."

"And to the queen's presence," added Ermengarde. "Moreover, I will so absorb her and her women that you and Lady Rosamunde shall easily slip away."

"And I can guarantee a safe departure from the tower," added Guy, "seeing that I am its warden, and control its gates. Where does this secret passage give?"

"Into a cellar at the foot of the stairs behind the guard room. Can you keep it clear, my lord?"

Beaufoy swore a great oath.

"I had forgot," he cried. "The queen's men share our guard. 'Twas a stipulation of Arragon to protect his people against our northern lambs, who sometimes forget an alliance to satisfy a need."

"Or a greed," rippled Yvonne. "The matter need not trouble you, however. This gentleman who helps me will be waiting for our coming, and the queen's uniform carries him in and out unquestioned."

"So smoothly do our difficulties yield!" exclaimed Ermengarde. "Surely there is witchcraft in all this."

But her husband remembered Count Hubert's prayer, and marvelled, and perhaps sent up a dumb, vague message himself—a doubt rather than a prayer, yet in any case a recognition.

"Now let us have everything well decided," he said aloud. "Once clear of the tower, shall Lady Rosamunde ride in my lady's train and mine to meet her husband, or does she ride with you and your friend?"

"My lord, I think it will be quicker for her to go with us, while you hinder the pursuit if it comes too quickly. The drawbridge can be down and much time lost before your men are able to shift it."

"Hindrance enough shall be forthcoming," said Guy, "but we are safe until evening. Arnaud with Foulquet and the secretary, Pierre, have ridden out to meet the Bishops of Maguelone and Bordeaux, who bring men to join us. No one else will visit Lady Rosamunde during their absence."

"Good," said Yvonne. "Now I shall want two men behind me to seize and bind the monk when I call."

"Can you do this?" wondered Guy.

"Ay, or shame my woman's craft. But there must be no noise to warn the guard at the rampart door, and there should be a distraction to keep their eyes away when Lady Rosamunde slips out."

Beaufoy beckoned to Hugo.

"We must have that song," he said. "Now let us settle the matter."

CHAPTER XXXIV

ALFOR the monk paced up and down outside the lady of Gervaudan's door with the key safely fastened in his girdle. Foulquet had bestowed this charge, knowing well that none other would fulfill it with such vigilance. Satan himself would not have scared the grim man from that door. If Bertrand did not come! Foulquet had promised—— The sweat broke out on his forehead! He reeled against the wall, shaking like a man gripped by an ague. The Church had taken away, but the Church gave richly to those who served her well—as he had served her.

He pulled himself together, and resumed the pacing up and down. Movement was necessary with the blood racing so fiercely through his veins. His thoughts leaped back to that moment when he had first seen her with the sunlight shining upon her gay, beautiful face. Something had snapped within him, broken a barrier as it were, and let loose all that was man in him to meet her womanhood. To be beaten back by the wall of his priesthood and her aversion!

He paused in his walk at the point where the passage from the ramparts bisected that wherein he stood. The door hung open to admit such languid breezes as drifted in from the sea to cool the stifling air, and the guard were rather without than within. The tinkle of a guitar fell on his ears, then a man's voice singing. Some idler

on the ramparts, he thought, and moved again towards the prisoner's door. Minutes passed as he stopped there, his burning eyes fixed on the massive wood with such intensity that it seemed as if their fire must drill holes in the thickness, and let him gaze through at his desire. His fingers twitched at the key. Why not open that door? She was at his mercy. Yet not quite, since Foulquet's commands had been explicit, and he dared not disobey. Moreover, there was the promise if Bertrand did not come. But if he came! The heavy brows drew together over a distorted face. Then Alfor the monk would taste the waters of Marah—black, poisoned by hell's brackish flood of thwarted desire. Why not make sure of the prize while it lay ready to his hand? Tomorrow might steal it from him forever. Now let him play the man, and take his soul's delight, or live forever a scorn to himself that he had not dared to grasp the meaning of his life.

Easy enough with the soldiers all absorbed by the singer, with the key in his hand. Easy enough to break that cold, proud beauty to his will, to lock the door upon her horror, and fly the palace, fly Montpellier before his crime should be discovered. Oh, easy indeed, save for the fear of her calm eyes and the shrinking from her abhorrence. He fought down the feeling, and in its stead arose a keener shrinking from the wish to harm her. What damnable folly was this? Memory rushed back to that night spent at Ponthieu, and to the agony of longing which waked him headlong from a dream of happiness in her love to the reality of the gulf between them. This black monk was not all sensualist. A dim streak of finer texture ran through the fiber of passions beaten back upon themselves, and stifled by his vocation. That one moment of recoil shone like a diamond in the

murk of his dark soul even though it disappeared forever after.

A faint rustle behind him broke upon his conflict, and springing round, he saw a woman's figure standing in the passage. A Saracen by her dress, and with big, strange eyes burning behind the gauze drapery which shrouded her head. Who was she? How had she come upon him so silently? He stared at her in stupid dumbness, for the apparition had scattered his deep absorption, and new thoughts had not yet time to replace it. The woman returned his gaze, swaying lightly to and fro. In her hand she carried a bunch of roses which gave forth a strange sweet perfume unlike anything he had smelt before.

"Greetings!" she said softly in the *lingua franca* which served as a common tongue between the Arabs, the Jews and the people of southern France and Spain.

"Greetings!" replied Alfor mechanically, then throwing off his lethargy, added roughly enough:

"What do you want, woman? Where do you come from?"

"I come from the sun, the moon, the stars. Have you ever seen the moonbeams dance on a silver stream?" She leaned nearer, and held her flowers close to his face. "Have you ever seen the moonlight glint in a woman's eyes?"

Crazy without doubt, but a sweet voice and sweet words. And what drug was this stealing upon his senses? So pungent, yet so soft! So intoxicating, yet so delicious in its strength!

He made an effort to recall his wits.

"You must go," he said harshly, "or I call the guard."

But the woman only laughed.

"Oh, Alfor," and she laughed again at his start, "will

you not smell the roses? Yet you love a rose, fairer than any that grow in my garden. Red rose of love! Rosamunde, Rose of the World!"

The monk leaped forward as if to seize her, but she remained quiet and his hand dropped.

"Now by——"

"St. Julian!" she cooed. "Do you not pray to the good saint? Fi, then, how shall your love be blessed? Nay, listen," and again she thrust her roses into his face, and held them there, and the scent rushed over him more strongly than ever, making him faint and giddy. He leaned against the door of Rosamunde's room. A mist swam before his eyes into his brain, dulling reality, and only leaving him the consciousness of the woman's musical voice and the sweet words she uttered.

"The lady sits alone behind the door whose key is in your hand. The key of paradise if you lack not the courage to turn it. A fair woman, friend. Such beauty grows not on every stalk for a man's plucking. Black clouds of hair to ripple like silk through your hands, red lips to kiss! What is sweeter than a woman's kiss! And 'tis yours for the taking to-day. To-morrow may be too late."

Red lips to kiss! Silken hair to fondle! And a woman alone. His for the taking—to-day. What fiend was this come to tempt him through the fierce passion which had wrecked his life? The mist blinded his eyes. He could not pierce the veil which hid her face. And those damned flowers! Here surely was a spell, an enchantment to rob a man of his senses. And still she whispered, but quickly now, taunting him with, "Coward! Fool, who will not when he may," and then a swift, flaming picture of all that might be his for the taking, until fear and prudence vanished before temptation, and

the passion he had nourished so long leaped beyond control, mastered him, and he, now a slave to its behest, snatched the key from his girdle, and turned to thrust it into the lock. The scent of the roses still troubled him. He felt his brain swim, fumbled with, rather than saw, the lock, but the key turned, the door opened, and he staggered into the room.

A momentary vision of Rosamunde's startled face, then a weight on his back, an arm clutching his throat, pressing the life out of him, a dense black cloud beating upon his brain and then nothing more.

. . . . . .

Three minutes later the door was locked upon a bunch of roses and a man lying gagged and bound upon the floor. Etienne of Ronais and two veiled women stood in the passage. From the ramparts came the noise of angry shouts, of blows and fierce imprecations. Sieur Hugo's song had not proved to the liking of the abbot's men, and a very pretty fight was in process.

Etienne laughed. "We shall not be seen," he said. "Come!" And they slipped along the passage on the right, and through a door to a room where the Lady Ermengarde awaited on fire with impatience. She uttered a soft cry at seeing them.

"All well?" she asked quickly.

"Well indeed," said Yvonne laughing, "thanks to a man's weakness and Sidi's drug. But of that later. Now, Lady Rosamunde, listen well to what you must do."

Dazed though she was by this sudden deliverance, Rosamunde made an effort to collect her wits and mark carefully Yvonne's instructions.

The plan was simple, yet called upon nerve and self-control. Here her own courage and dominant pride

stood up in strong alliance, and she turned a quiet, confident face upon Ermengarde.

"I am ready, but before going I would thank you."

Once again, as in the hall at Ponthieu, these two women stared at each other, but to-day the joy shone in the black eyes and the hunger in the gray. A look of understanding flashed across Ermengarde's face.

"So it has come," she whispered, "and you have not paid the price."

"I pay," said Rosamunde as softly, "oh, I pay, but in a different coin."

Yvonne called impatiently from the door. Etienne had already sped away to the tower, where he should enter the passage and be ready to open the panel in the queen's chamber.

Rosamunde drew the thick veil closer about her face, and with one quick intake of her breath followed Ermengarde and Yvonne to the queen's presence.

A guard stood outside the door, but within Marie of Montpellier sat alone with three of her ladies, denying boredom with work at her tapestry frame. A young page was reading a love poem of Marveil's, but when Ermengarde entered he put down the book, and at a sign from his mistress left the room. The lady of Beaufoy explained her errand, and the queen clapped her hands for joy.

"Heaven bless your happy thought, my lady. Bid the woman show her wares."

Yvonne came forward and touched her brow in the Moorish salute, then very composedly began to unfasten her basket. Rosamunde had no active share in what followed. It was Yvonne who displayed her silks and golden tissues, Yvonne who, speaking in slow, grave accents, played the Saracen woman's dignity with a

realism and an enjoyment that were unfeigned, and as free from nervousness as if life and death did not really hang in the balance. Rosamunde watched her in amazement, only too conscious of the wild beating of her own heart. She stood a little behind Ermengarde, and no one paid any attention to the silent, veiled woman. She marvelled at the simplicity of her escape so far. Was it really possible that she might outwit the abbot? And would the moment never come for them to seek that panel? She sent covert glances round the room. Where might this panel be? The room was not large. Two deep windows faced the door, with a pillared balcony beyond. Another door pierced the left-hand wall. Ten paces away on the right a tall, massive cupboard of Persian workmanship stood forward from the wall. A few chairs and footstools completed the furniture. Now where was the panel hidden? If some evil chance had prevented Etienne from reaching the passage! What if the door did not open? In spite of her courage, beads of moisture broke out on her forehead at the thought. She lacked the sheer love of danger for danger's sake which helped Yvonne in her faultless make-believe, and time was passing. At any moment Alfor's absence might be noticed, search made for her.

Yvonne drew a last bale of silk from her basket and looked about her in feigned perplexity. Ermengarde stepped forward, took the silk, and uttered a little cry of admiration. The queen bent forward and also cried aloud at the marvel of gold and silver embroidery which lay in folds at her feet.

"Fit for a queen's train, what say you, ladies?" she exclaimed, and Ermengarde called to one of them to help her lift the shining stuff and drape it about the royal shoulders.

"Over the arm—so! Now, madam, this fold about the breast, a little wider here——" So she ran on, and the queen laughed, well pleased, while her ladies crowded round as absorbed as herself, and all forgot the two Saracen women.

The moment had come. Rosamunde fought down the black mist of excitement which threatened to blind her and took Yvonne's outstretched hand. Ten paces to the right brought them to the farther wall of the apartment up against the Persian coffer. The queen and her ladies were clustered near the windows. As Yvonne's fingers tapped softly on the paneled wall, Ermengarde slipped a lace veil over the queen's head. A moment later, when she drew it back and fastened it with a pin, the two Saracen women had disappeared.

Quite three minutes of feminine absorption in the queen's finery passed before their absence was noticed, then to allay the astonishment Ermengarde volunteered to make inquiries.

She came back some twenty minutes later with a story of a vain search. The Saracens had vanished in a mystery which was never solved for Marie of Montpellier. And she did not trouble in the matter even when the lady of Gervaudan's disappearance became noised abroad. The abbot might manage his own affairs; she profited to the extent of forty yards and more of the handsomest silk her eyes had ever seen. What the bargain with Sidi-el-Mara cost Etienne of Ronais remained a secret between them, but the Moor's generosity, his friendship with Yvonne, and a natural pleasure in thwarting a high priest of the "Christian dogs" probably lightened the money value of the debt.

The sun was just sinking into the Mediterranean when

"The fugitives were twenty miles away by now."

the abbot and Foulquet discovered Rosamunde's flight. By then she and Hubert had been riding four hours on the way to Béziers, while Etienne and Yvonne were once more safely in their house opposite the Tour de la Babotte, having no reason to fear suspicion.

This way and that rushed Arnaud's men. A company swept hot-foot after them in pursuit, but two miles beyond the gates it found the Baron of Tarn and his men waiting to accord them a welcome too warmly affectionate to suit a cold northern taste. The fight came quick and fast, and Arnaud's men gallopped back to Montpellier, leaving five comrades behind. Then night fell. The fugitives were twenty miles away by now and in a friendly country. Morning would find them at Pézenas, and safely beyond the abbot's reach.

His cold, white face shimmered in the dumb fury consuming him. It was not his way to rage aloud like Foulquet, but his passion ran all the deeper for its silence. When Alfor was brought before him, the monk, still dazed by the effect of the drug, shrank away from the menace of that still face. He would have lied, but Arnaud beat down his clumsy fabrication, and twisted the truth from him. Yet it needed a Daniel to enable him to tell what he did not know. He could not identify the woman who had drugged him, could only remember that she had called him by his name. He was taken away to punishment, and Arnaud sent a request to Guy of Beaufoy for his presence. He came, very haughty in his bearing, with a black look at Bishop Foulquet, and not overmuch courtesy towards the abbot. Baron and churchman were sworn predatory foes all Christendom over.

"Sir count," said Arnaud very politely, "I would know why your men removed my guard from the rampart door."

"Lord abbot," said Guy, speaking very stiffly, "your men set upon my squire, and used him foully, whereupon his comrades went to his aid. Much noise ensued, and I, as warden of the eastern ramparts, used my authority to quell the disturbance."

"Removing my guard! So much presumption lies beyond your ward, Count Guy."

"Not so, your Holiness. My ward is mine to command. You may relieve me of the charge if you will."

The threat was undisguised. This noble's service and his men could ill be spared.

"How came it that you knew nothing of the sentry who guarded Lady Rosamunde?" asked Arnaud.

"How should I know of the sentry, not knowing of the prisoner?" retorted Guy.

Then Foulquet struck in. "Your men escorted Count Hubert from the city."

"And then——?" inquired Guy. They did not answer immediately, having no sure ground beneath their feet.

Count Guy laughed in his black beard, well pleased.

"By your leave, good abbot," said he, and going to the door opened it to admit the Lady Ermengarde.

"My lady has a message for you, Bishop Foulquet. Have you forgotten our last meeting?"

Forgotten! Once again he saw the slight figure in its gray trunk and hose, saw the white face and burning eyes of the woman he had cursed. Now that same woman stood before him in regal splendor of red and purple silk with jewels flashing on her breast, and twisting in the heavy plaits of her red hair, and the same hatred shining in her fierce, proud face.

"Oh, Foulquet, Bishop of Toulouse," she began, and her voice was cold and hard like ice, "I have been overlong your debtor for certain words uttered in the forest

before Vaucennes. 'Adultress!' 'Murderess!' And an exhortation to slay! Hard names for a woman to carry in memory, but their sting is drawn to-night."

She held his eyes for a moment to her vindictive triumph, then with the barest inclination to the abbot, left the room as quietly as she had entered it. Guy followed her, pausing at the door to deliver his last thrust.

"If need arises, Aquitaine shall know of the outrage offered to his kinswoman. Now Heaven keep your reverences in full meed of joy and peace," and he left them to the cud of their baffled fury, and in Foulquet's case, the maddening certainty of a woman's victorious revenge.

Bertrand of Crein, riding like a demented fiend along the road to Pézenas, met Hubert and Rosamunde a mile outside the gates. Godfrey of Cern with Enid and Margot came in their train.

"Mother of Heaven!" swore Bertrand, swaying in his saddle, for the reaction of beholding her safe came too swiftly, and set earth and sky whirling before his eyes.

The mist cleared, and he heard Gervaudan's voice explaining, and in a confused way understood how Guy of Beaufoy had paid his debt.

Rosamunde spoke no word, and did not look at him at all. So these two came together again, and as of old rode through the scented forest air. But to-day her husband rode between.

Thus they drew nigh to Béziers, and passed through its gates, whose falling clang hurled checkmate to Rome's move.

CHAPTER XXXV

BÉZIERS was not the young viscount's only care. Carcassonne, the key and stronghold of his possessions, called urgently for his help. Now he did all that man might do to render Béziers siege-proof. Foresight had already accomplished the greater part of the work. Bastions and turrets, walls and towers were doubly and trebly strengthened, the town had been amply provisioned, wells guaranteed a water supply. Material defenses were stoutly assured. What of the spirit which should animate them?

Roger went among his people, laying facts before them, not sparing the truth. "I will die for you, my people, if need be," he told them quietly, "but you must be ready to die for each other. All for one, one for all, and God protect the right."

His devotion won theirs, rather added to the affection these Biterrois had always felt for their young and gallant lord. When they saw him so calmly risking his all, putting his own life at naught for the people he considered a sacred charge, they broke into a spontaneous outburst of fervent enthusiasm. Men and women surged round him, cheering him and praying heaven's blessing on his head. Men enrolled themselves to fight, women disdained tears, and sent their beloved forth with smiles. No doubting the spirit of the Biterrois now. Reassured in that respect, Roger of Béziers confided the governorship of the town to Hubert of Gervaudan, and the com-

mand of the soldiers to Bertrand of Crein. Then, accompanied by his young wife and his mother, Adelaide, Countess of Béziers, he bade farewell to his fair city, and departed to Carcassonne.

When clear of the gates, he drew rein and looked back. The sun was setting in a mass of crimson clouds, and a blood-red haze shimmered over the town on its rocky pinnacle. Roger's brave heart sank in that moment, pierced by dread. Was this ruddy glow a portent? He had done all that mortal man could to save his own. The issue lay with those mysterious forces which direct this world's course. Weighed down by depression, he continued the journey, and after him in their hundreds streamed the Jews, who were alarmed by his departure, and imagined a greater security lay in being with him.

Béziers stood upon a hill whose base was washed by the river Orb. The city rose in tiers like a vast amphitheater, its summit being crowned by the palace and the citadel. Each separate tier was surrounded by a formidable wall of defense, with full complement of towers and heavy gates, so that to any one looking down from the palace gardens, the town presented a vista of endless fortifications. Here and there on the ramparts flashed points of dazzling light where the sun gleamed on a sentry's armor. Such bright flashes twinkled like beacon fires signalling from wall to wall. Bertrand knew his work, and his men were all at their posts.

Southward the river wound to the Mediterranean, whose blue waters shimmered against the rosy sky. In the west the sun hung like a ball of fire above the mountain peaks of the Corbières, but in the north a black cloud curtain draped the spurs of the Cevennes, and behind that curtain swarmed the Roman locusts of destruction.

The sun dropped lower upon the Corbières. Its glory, however, still quivered over the earth. Yet that effulgence of purple and gold and crimson splendor seemed to hold a menace. The beauty was too lurid, its colors too garish. Those heavy masses banked in the north looked more ominously profound against such brilliance. And across the metallic turquoise of the western sky, and against the orange bed of the setting sun streaked feathery lines of red cloud in weirdest shapes. One in particular looked like a bloody hand that, dragging itself through the ether, had left its mark in long trails of scarlet, smoky vapor.

Such a thought came vaguely to Rosamunde as she stepped through an arched doorway on to the terrace-garden of the palace, and walking to the parapet, looked down upon the city.

Two days had passed since her coming into Béziers, and she had not seen Bertrand again. He was in the citadel. So much she knew, and beneath that knowledge weariness and apathy had dropped from her like a mask. Once more her pulses throbbed. Life beat through her veins, and although she no longer feared herself as of old, she could no more help rejoicing in his nearness than she could help breathing.

He came on to the terrace in that same moment with her husband and Philippe of Albret, and with Etienne of Ronais, who carried in his arms something that brought a chill of terror to Rosamunde's heart. A slim figure in page's dress, with golden hair curling about a white, still face, whose eyes were shut, and whose mouth was soft and red like the heart of a rose.

"Lady," said Etienne, "we are from hell. Will you succor my love?"

He staggered, and Bertrand caught Yvonne from him,

while Hubert seized his arm, and Philippe went in search of wine. Very gently Bertrand laid his burden upon the terrace. Rosamunde sank to her knees and cushioned the golden head upon her lap. Presently, the drooping lids flickered open, and two great eyes looked up from the man to the woman who faced each other over the dying form of Yvonne the nun.

She knew Rosamunde, and smiled.

"Heaven save you, lady, and your brave love. What did I tell you in the convent garden? Love and life! Life!" She struggled to rise, and as Rosamunde lifted her a little blood dyed her hands from a wound in the girl's side.

"Etienne!" called Yvonne, "Etienne!"

He lurched from Hubert, and fell on his knees beside her, groaning in his agony. She put her arm about his neck, and drew his face to hers.

"Never fret, love, that I die young," she said. "Age was not meant for me. Youth and the fire of life and the quick, fierce throb of life! Ah, God, it has been good to live!"

"And has the river of delight run dry that you can die unlamenting?" he cried passionately. "Have I kissed the warmth of your life cold?"

"Not so," she panted, for her strength was ebbing quickly now, "your love fed my life, yet having drunk my fill of such delight, I'd hold it mean to grumble when the measure is meted . . . "

Her voice died away. Etienne clasped her more tightly in his arms.

"Yvonne, Yvonne!" he cried wildly, and fell to kissing her red, splendid lips.

She stirred, opened her eyes again and laughed faintly. Her look wandered from her lover to Rosamunde's pity-

ing face, and on to Bertrand, who still knelt by Rosamunde's side.

"To our field-meeting,
Stole I at even,
There was my true love come before."

Clear and sweet rose the words on the still air. Rosamunde caught her breath sharply, and Count Philippe, coming through the doorway on the terrace with wine in his hand, paused spellbound like the others by the dying girl's singing.

"So sweet was his greeting
(Lady of Heaven!)
That I am blessed for evermore.
Kissed he me? Yea, thousandfold!
See, my red lips are not yet cold."

She sang it to the end without a tremor, and finished on a little ringing note of triumph. Then she beckoned Rosamunde nearer, and took her hand and groped toward Bertrand with her other hand. He, seeing her desire without understanding it, gave his fingers into her clasp, and she joined their hands together, and laid them over the wound of her body.

"Life is so short," she gasped, "and death is long, but life without love is already dead——"

Her elfish eyes laughed straight up into Hubert of Gervaudan's quiet face, then she gasped again, smiled, and died.

And thus Rosamunde and Bertrand knelt with hands clasped above the breast of her who had been Yvonne of the Beating Heart, but whose gay, brave heart should now beat nevermore.

For a space they remained motionless, cramped by grief and horror, but in a little Bertrand helped Rosa-

munde to her feet, and loosed her hand. Neither looked at each other, and Hubert, stepping forward, gave her his arm with a very fine courtesy, and led her away to her room. They did not speak. Words must have poisoned both hurts beyond all bearing.

They buried Yvonne that night in a rose-grown corner of the garden without any prayers, save the muttered blessings of Bertrand and Philippe, who dug her grave, and the heartbroken farewell of Etienne of Ronais, who laid her on the cold earth.

For she was a runaway nun, an apostate bride of heaven, excommunicated, cursed, dying unabsolved, and doomed to burn in hell forever. No priest would bury her, and so they brought her to the roses, and made her last bed beneath a shower of petals no redder than her mouth. Small heed gave Yvonne's soul to priestly curse. The radiance of her spirit seemed yet to cling to her, she smiled in death. Rather they seemed to be heaping earth upon a living fire than on cold clay.

"Go now!" said Bertrand when Etienne had laid her down, and he went, not able to witness the mold defile her fair white face.

But later still that same night, Rosamunde stole all alone to the grave, and knelt beside it in prayer. The moon, sailing overhead in a nest of soft fleecy cloudlets, shone upon her bowed figure, and kissed Yvonne's resting place into a couch of gentle beauty. On such a night in just such glittering radiance had she danced over the convent lawn like some elfin fay of sweet enchantment. Memory twisted Rosamunde's heart. A deep sob shook her soul with unavailing regret.

For Etienne had told his story of how suspicion had fallen upon them as having helped Rosamunde's flight. A

traitor in his household, a sudden stir of memory in Alfor's brain roused by that utterance of his name, their swift flight, and the hot pursuit led by Bishop Foulquet himself. He told of the desperate race to Pézenas, of how they had outstripped the bishop and his men, and were within a mile of Béziers and safety, when a band of *routiers* set upon them. Once again their horses carried them beyond danger, himself unhurt and all unconscious of Yvonne's wound until the gates of Béziers closed behind them. Then she sank from her horse, and her own hands plucked the arrow from her side. The rest they knew.

Now as Rosamunde knelt weeping by the roses, a man came swiftly from the trees. The moon shone upon Etienne's white face and upon the dagger in his hand. Rosamunde did not see him, and he gave no heed to her, but standing erect above the grave turned the dagger's point upon his breast. In that moment, however, another man sped quickly from the trees, and Bertrand seized his arm.

Etienne gasped, struggled for a moment, then stood quiet, while Rosamunde, startled by the noise, rose to her feet.

"Why do you stay me?" asked Etienne. "My life must run with hers."

"I need fighting men," answered Bertrand. "Will you not kill one of her enemies at least before you die, or shall her death go unavenged?"

They saw him shiver, but a faint light dawned in his dead eyes.

"Perhaps," he muttered. "She never loved a coward, and I am afraid to live." He threw up his arms to heaven. "Oh, my bright heart, pray the angel of death to remember me soon."

The moonlight played coldly upon his agony. Moved uncontrollably by her pity and remorse, Rosamunde laid her hand upon his arm.

"I would not have won safety at such a cost," she said brokenly.

Etienne shook his head. "Do not you grieve, lady. She juggled with life as with a toy. If not you, then another. A flame! Can one chain a flame?"

He made a hopeless gesture, and turned back among the trees, leaving his dagger in Bertrand's hand. Bertrand looked at Rosamunde.

"Will you weep for her who would not weep for herself?" he asked.

"Her life bought mine," came the low response.

"She paid the price with a laugh."

"Ay!" said Rosamunde, and stood for a while in silence while his eyes feasted upon her beauty, and his hunger turned him sick and cold. For she looked as she had looked on that night now so long ago in the convent garden, and he remembered that then he had held her in his arms. And as if his thoughts touched hers to set them quivering in the same pain, she turned upon him suddenly, flinging up her head in the quick, proud way of old, and the moonlight kissed the curves of her soft white throat.

"Never pity her. She lived."

The words came sharpened by envy and by pain, then as if afraid, she caught her veil about her and hurried away.

And he, strengthened by the last year's discipline of his soul, suffered her to go unhindered. But he put out his arms in the moonlight, and a smile twisted his face awry.

"Curious, how badly an empty arm can ache."

Then he, too, went away, and Yvonne lay alone beneath her roses and the smiling moon.

North, south, east, and west spread Rome's legions, burning and killing wherever they went. A great number of petty chieftains, who had shut their eyes and ears to warnings, were taken completely by surprise. Some resisted and were slain, others, aghast at the horrors around them, hastened to make peace with the enemy. But the people themselves received no mercy, had no other shelter to look for save that of the fortified towns, and they poured into Béziers in their thousands.

When the sun rose from the placid waters of the Mediterranean on the seventeenth day of July in the year of grace 1209, his light revealed a marvellous picture to the awe-struck Biterrois. So far as the eye could reach to the northern horizon, it fell upon a multitude, so vast, so tightly pressed in serried ranks, that the fields themselves seemed to sway to their movements; while the brilliance and contrasting colors of a thousand pennons and banners floating overhead filled the air like so many myriad flowers waving in the breeze. At the head of these columns came the white splash of tents, marking the dwellings of the various knights whose military knowledge was to guide the ignorance of the Church's servants, and inspire their courage. A great blaze of purple grandeur indicated where the Abbot of abbots had place. Behind the leaders came the ranks of tried and seasoned soldiers, and behind them surged endless multitudes of the ignorant and greedy, strangers from every part of Europe, all hungry for plunder, but having no idea of warfare. Raw material from which in time a very terrible engine of destruction should be fashioned.

Well might the people of Béziers crowd their ramparts

in dumb amazement before the sight of this army encamped beneath their walls. Small blame to them for that first chill of dread or for the anxious glances cast upon their governor and their captain. They asked no better than to fight, but here spread a multitude as innumerable as the grains of sand on the sea-shore—a flood of humanity whose vastness seemed able to swell over their heads, and swallow them in its gulf.

But the governor was smiling, and their beloved soldier count, with the red rose of war flaming on his breast, was going among them with a laugh and a jest to lift up their spirits, and a steady confidence to inspire theirs. And the governor's wife, the beautiful lady of Gervaudan, moved among the women with kind, grave words to nerve their courage, and a splendid calm on her pale face to quiet their frightened eyes.

So the tremor passed, and Béziers looked to its arms with a very grim determination to give a good account of itself.

But when Hubert of Gervaudan and Bertrand of Crein were alone together, they smiled no longer. Skill and courage and God's good will might keep men out of the town; hunger and thirst were foes within the gates. Béziers had no forces sufficient to dispel the thousands of besiegers, and, well provisioned as the garrison was, yet when fighting powers were exhausted it meant only a question of time before the last soul died of starvation or the city surrendered.

"A relieving army could alone save us," said Count Hubert.

"And as every army of Europe is against us, where will you find that?" asked Bertrand.

Hubert shrugged his shoulders. "After all, men can only die once."

"But the women," said Bertrand slowly.

Hubert looked at him. "Ay, the women! And above all my lady——"

He took a turn up the room, then came back to his friend and regarded him squarely in the face.

"Chance played us a sorry trick in putting me between you and happiness, Bertrand. But what can I do? I am old, yet not so old that life does not still run strongly in my veins, and I may not willfully destroy what God has made."

"God forbid!" said Bertrand shortly.

"But," continued Hubert, laying his hand on Bertrand's shoulder, "we have dark times before us and death will find work for his scythe. If anything happens to me, remember that Rosamunde is your sacred charge. I bequeath her happiness to your hands."

Then Bertrand's face stiffened, and the hard, bright look came into his blue eyes.

"By the love I bear her, I swear I would not have happiness at such a price. Now let me speak, Hubert. My honor has gone sick this year past."

He was leaning against the deep window embrasure, a very splendid figure in the prime of his manhood. No woman could be blamed for finding him good in her eyes, thought Hubert, with a real pity in his heart for his young wife, and a stifled sigh for his own vanished youth.

"There was a time," said Bertrand, speaking slowly and pulling his long mustache, "when I swore to steal your wife. Steal, mark you, Hubert. She was not privy to my base will."

"She is in all things a most noble lady," said Gervaudan.

"If you had heard her lash me for my cowardice! She

would have married me had I found the spirit to take her from you."

"Ay," said Hubert.

"I can hear her now. 'Your wife, Bertrand, never your wanton!' And I, black fool, swore to drag her down. I made her life a misery at St. Gilles. For she loved me, and I played upon her love, and still she would not yield although her love well-nigh beat her in twain against the armor of her honesty. Coward, she called me, God knows how truly."

He paused and bent his head upon his hand. "And then, Hubert," he said, "came that last evening's madness when I would have smirched her white soul——" He sprang upright and glared at his friend. "Chance saved her. I was a brute beast. God, how I cursed!—Then you came and tamed me, old friend, and I've had a year to learn that there be some things a gentleman may not do."

"Well?" said Hubert quietly.

"The lesson is learned," said Bertrand shortly.

The door opened, and Rosamunde came in. Seeing the two men together she paused, but Hubert beckoned her forward.

"Bertrand and I were never better friends," he said. "Our union is cemented by the love and respect we both bear to the very noblest lady in the land."

He kissed her hand, and she looked from him to Bertrand with troubled eyes, saying no word.

And Bertrand bowed low and left them, with his hungry teeth biting his lips, and in his heart a thanksgiving for the need of the sixty thousand souls in Béziers to keep his thoughts from dangerous lingering upon the Lady Rosamunde of Gervaudan.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TWO days passed. On the third Arnaud of Cîteaux, advised by the Dukes of Burgundy and of Aquitaine, sent a messenger to the beleaguered city, asking that the bishop, Reginald of Montpeyroux, should come and listen to such terms as Rome was mercifully willing to make, and whose acceptance would save Béziers from destruction. The bishop went, delivered his message and returned to Arnaud in despair with a story of a fierce refusal and unshaken defiance from a mad and stiff-necked generation self-doomed to destruction.

In the afternoon of that same day, Philippe of Albret headed a sortie upon the enemy's outposts which, taken by surprise, fled at first in disorder. The Biterrois, however, charged too far, and reinforcements hurrying up to steady the flying soldiers, a furious fight ensued, in which Albret and his men were swept back beneath the walls, and only regained the city after heavy losses.

In this manner on July 21, 1209, did the campaign begin, and the curtain rise upon a war unparalleled in history for the vindictive fury of its instigators, for its cruelty and horror, and the unspeakable atrocities committed upon a helpless, innocent people.

On the morrow, the feast of Mary Magdalene, when the first gray light of dawn filtered through the darkness, the harsh call of trumpets sounded from afar over

the country. This herald of conflict was followed by a prolonged, undefinable noise, a rumble, swelling into ever louder volume like the roar of wind through the forest or the thunder of surf breaking upon a rocky shore. Indistinct at first, this sound came nearer and nearer to the listeners in the city, bursting at last with ominous clearness and revealing its cause. The thousands of crusaders, whose tents covered the surrounding country, were moving forward, and their enormous masses advancing in long waves upon the outer fortifications.

The ground shook beneath their feet, the air rang with their shouts. They marched in confidence. Rome had promised them success—wealth and pleasure, eternal beatitude.

Such an overwhelming mass of men rolling forward like a vast sea, making the sweet morning hideous with its roars, might have filled most men with dread. But not the Biterrois. Shout for shout they flung at the enemy, blew trumpet for trumpet, and flying to their belfrys, set every tocsin ringing madly in defiance as well as in signals of alarm.

Up came the sun, and as his beams splashed upon the noble walls and vast towers, revealing their height and breadth and grim air of resistance, fresh cries rose from the people, cries of triumph and of confidence in their beloved ramparts.

Men came pouring into the streets, hurrying to take up their posts, vying with each other for the places of honorable danger. Their women accompanied them, nerving them with smiles and stimulating them with praise. Courage and patriotism knew no bounds. The streets echoed with the voices of old and young, all breathing devotion and a willing zeal of self-sacrifice. Not one but was ready to immolate himself for the cause.

The bells still rang high above the noise of cries and rushing feet, all was fire and dash and resolution.

But gradually the tumult subsided. The men were at their posts, the women and children in such places of refuge as seemed the safest. The streets and squares became deserted, silent as the grave. A heavy silence brooded over the town. Men looked at each other, looked to themselves. The women prayed. It was the lull before the storm.

Bertrand had visited every post on the ramparts, had satisfied himself that each commanding officer understood his orders, and had shaken hands with Philippe d'Albret, who was in charge of the main gate in the third line of fortifications.

Now, calling to Bûchon, and with Gaston at his heels, he profited by the momentary quiet, and sped to the palace, where there was a farewell to make.

The palace and the citadel formed the very last defenses of the town, and were gained by only one door set in a massive tower and strongly defended. The tower was pierced with loopholes for archers, and if by any chance the gate were rushed, the enemy would still have to face the formidable machicouli, with the stones hurtling from its embrasures, and the boiling lead pouring through the apertures made for this purpose.

Beyond this machicouli a narrow path wound steeply between the outer and inner walls to another equally formidable tower, and because the width of this path barely allowed two men to move abreast, a concentrated attack would become impossible with archers on the walls to pick off the men as they advanced.

This should be the last place of refuge if the town fell. Count Hubert had seen to its ample provisioning. As became its importance it was under the command of a

picked man, a tried soldier, Bertrand's own choice.

It has been said that only one entrance led into this precinct, yet there was a second exit, a subterranean passage beneath the keep of the citadel, and which, passing under the walls, led to the cloisters of St. Nazaire. This church stood in a retired and complicated alley of hovels and shops on the outer boundary of the city, where the ground sloped sharply to the river, and was so obscured by its surrounding buildings that strangers might pass close by without suspecting its existence.

Bertrand knew of this path, and it lay clear for the garrison's flight should that become necessary. Against which contingency he took the strong precautions already described, and then refused to contemplate the possibility. He made his rounds among the men, exchanged a few last words with the officer, then went in search of Rosamunde, whom he found in the room opening on to the terrace, and directing a crowd of pale-faced women in the making of salve and bandages. Enid and Margot were doing their share, and at the sight of Gaston, Margot came running to him.

"Gaston!" she quivered, "Gaston!"

"Wish me luck," said the boy. "I shall win my spurs to-day. Why, sweetheart, never weep."

He drew the child aside, and tried to comfort her. Enid stared at Bûchon, but his eyes were fixed on Bertrand. The latter beckoned him forward to where he stood by Rosamunde.

"I promised you heaven, friend," he said with his old gay laugh; "here comes a foretaste of hell."

"There be heavens and heavens," grunted Bûchon. "I have seen Rodolphe of Verlay's banner yonder."

"Then you will wait him here," said Bertrand. "Your life is mine, you said."

"Ay, lord."

"I use it in the service of Lady Rosamunde. Guard her well, and if harm reaches her, never look me in the face again."

He turned to Rosamunde. "Death is sometimes the least evil that can befall a woman. The moment may come when Bûchon shall serve us both best in slaying you."

"Yes," she answered steadily.

"You understand, Bûchon."

"Ay, lord."

"Then give me your hand. I have shown you this favor above all other men."

He would have shaken Bûchon's hand, but the latter knelt and kissed his.

"May I rot in hell if I prove unworthy," he muttered.

"And now," said Bertrand to Rosamunde, "come with me for a little."

They went out into the solitude of the terrace, and looked long and long into each other's eyes. Sorrow had dimmed her beauty, yet he found her more beautiful than of old, for the pain darkening her eyes and the droop of her passionate mouth were for him. He, too, had changed. The old, careless, merry look so rarely brightened his face now. He was sterner, more rugged, yet with a suggestion of new strength about him like that of a man who has tried himself and proved equal to the trial.

He wore a complete suit of black mail, lacking only the helmet with its scarlet plume. The roses lay upon his breast, the ducat lay beneath them. Rosamunde eyed it wistfully, and a little smile trembled on her lips.

"You did not forget," she whispered. "I could not have borne that."

"I shall remember while life lasts—oh, my beloved!"

He knelt at her feet, burying his face in her dress, and she heard him mutter:

"God have mercy! God have mercy!"

Yet when he arose there was no passion in his eyes, but the unalterable pain of a far deeper, because far purer, love, which must renounce.

"Thank God for love," he said; "thank you, my dear heart, for showing me its glory. And now, farewell!"

She sank her eyes in his, and laid her hand upon her heart.

"I believe a golden thread binds my heart to yours—so," she said, and lifting her hands from her own breast, put them upon his. He held them, and listened to the music of her voice. "And nothing can break this thread, Bertrand, and although you go far from me, my beloved, yet can we never be separated. And one day," here she leaned closer to him, and the glory of love shining in her eyes made her face a most divine wonder to see, "one day, in this world or the next, our thread will draw us ever nearer and nearer each to the other, so that at last we shall be together, my beloved, together for all eternity."

He saw her smile like a rainbow through his tears, then knelt again and kissed her hands, and pressed them against his wet eyes.

"God have you in his keeping," she said.

The hoarse cry of a trumpet rang up from the ramparts below. Bertrand sprang to his feet, and dashed the tears away.

"I must go," he said hurriedly, "yet first take this." He snatched the dagger from his breast, but Rosamunde showed him her own.

"Never fall alive into their hands," he said hoarsely.

"Trust me," she answered. "Will the town fall?"

"God and the devil alone know, but I take no risks. If the worst happens, expect me here."

With that he turned back into the room, and calling Gaston, hurried away. No more tears, no thoughts of love now. He was the stern, indomitable soldier, with but one idea, and that to save the town confided to his care.

From the terrace Rosamunde watched him hastening along the lines of ramparts immediately below, then he disappeared, and she went back with a composed face to the ordering of her ointments and the winding of her bandages.

Women were cast in strong molds in those times of continual stress. They could defend a castle at need, or raise armies to follow their lords. They did not faint at bloodshed, nor unnerve their men by tears. And Rosamunde of Gervaudan was no exception in a band of heroic women.

She gave heaven thanks for the joy which Bertrand's love had brought into her life, and did not let her mute prayers for his safety hinder her work, nor check the distribution of salve and linen to the eager women, whose task it was to bear them to the various ramparts. Even the child Margot stopped her crying for Gaston, and bent her small fingers in useful toil.

Bûchon had crossed the courtyard to the massive tower which shut the palace from the town. Every soldier was at his post in the machicouli which guarded the gate, in the loopholes of the tower, and behind the parapets. Great vats of boiling oil and lead simmered close to hand. Nothing had been omitted that could make for adequate defense. Bûchon exchanged a few gruff words with one or two of the men, then returned to the

palace, and took up a position on the terrace from whence he could watch the operations below. His eyes looked wistful. He had promised himself a fill of fighting, and now must remain inactive with the blood-thirst unslaked. Yet it never entered his head to quarrel with Bertrand's order. His lord had spoken. It was enough.

To him presently came Enid, very comely and with a queer expression in her eyes.

"Is the fighting begun?" said she.

He shook his head, chary as ever of words.

"Can't you give an answer?" she asked sharply. "You've not learnt better manners in this last year."

"My speech goes lame," he said slowly.

"Ay, and your eyes go blind," she retorted.

He stared at her helplessly, but was far from guessing her meaning, and a dull, rumbling sound rising at that moment from beneath, effectually diverted his attention.

"What is it?" cried Enid sharply.

"The assault," he answered, and she saw a savage glow rise to his eyes. "Fiends of hell, send Verlay in my path."

"Saints protect us rather! Man, we may all die."

"What then? Maybe I'd find my wife and little Blanche in heaven. But first I would kill Red Rodolphe who killed them."

The old ferocity made him hideous to behold. Enid shrank away, then, recovering, touched him on the arm.

"They'll be happy enough in paradise. Will you be a fool, and lose happiness on earth, with Margot wanting a father, and loving you as such?"

He blinked at her like a stupid owl.

"Oh," cried she exasperated, "the devil take me if I know why my fancy must needs set itself on such a fool. I love you, and I want you for my man, and you're a

fool, and I hate you, I hate you," and with that she lifted her hand and boxed him soundly on the ears, then burst into weeping, and fled back to her work.

Bûchon stood where she left him, his mouth wide open. But he had no time to ponder over her curious behavior. The noise of fighting rose louder on the air, the assault had commenced in earnest, and his place was between his master's lady and danger. He passed quickly through the room, and went to a post on the parapet whence he might take his share in the fighting if it came that way, or be ready to hurry back to his charge at her immediate need.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HUBERT OF GERVAUDAN, Governor of Béziers, responsible with Bertrand of Crein for the welfare of thirty thousand bodies and souls, received the first onslaught of Arnaud's army at the main gate of the outer fortifications. He had taken farewell of his wife before Bertrand sought her, and was already on the ramparts when Bertrand came springing down from the palace.

Now what of the storm and sack of Béziers! Hours of fierce fighting, of vigorous attack, of gallant repulse. Hours of hope and fear, hours of ferocious assault, of courageous resistance, and then——

The chronicles leave no detailed account, but over all looms a black shadow of horror unspeakable.

"It was written," said the Arabs. And the Moving Finger wrote, and Béziers fell. Military genius, skill, forethought, courage, devotion went for naught save the building of a funeral pyre.

The crusaders attacked two hours after dawn. Three hours later the outer moat was in their hands, and they were beneath the city ramparts. Scaling ladders uprose against the walls crowded with a living freight. Shouts from the ramparts, a rush of men. Fierce, hot faces snarling over the parapet into cruel, tigerish faces upturned from the swaying ladder. Men at its foot to steady it, men above to force it from a resting place. On it the load of men groaning, panting, swearing, with

but one dominant thought, and that to leap into the hedge of steel upon the parapets. Ah, by all the saints true Catholics worship, the ladder rests at last. The foremost man springs into an embrasure, is seized by two iron hands, poised in mid-air and flung bodily into space. His twisted figure falls blackly against the blue sky, then he dies on the rocks below.

"One," said Bertrand of Crein joyously.

"Two," said Philippe of Albret, "even more," for the Biterrois had seized the ladder and pushed it from their walls, and it tottered like some live despairing thing seeking a hold in the void, and finding none. Right and left it swayed, back, ever back, one moment stood sharply defined against the sky, then crashed to the ground, followed by masses of rock and stone hurled down by the Biterrois upon the mangled bodies beneath.

Yet this was but one incident among hundreds similar. All round the walls rose the crowded ladders. One down here, but two safe there, and the enemy leaping on to the ramparts. The Biterrois received them, beat them back, flung them over the parapet into eternity. Still they came on in their thousands, directed by the skill of the greatest military genius in Christendom. Arnaud of Amouri was the acknowledged head of the crusaders, but Simon of Montfort played the chief part in that siege of Béziers.

Presently, the Biterrois marked the arrival of moving towers, those wheeled platforms which, being covered, sheltered the men they carried, and could not be pushed over like the ladders.

Béziers set its teeth. Behind this first wall of fortifications lay houses having women and children within.

Count Hubert stood on the roof of the main tower watching the attack. Bertrand was beside him. The

two men conferred quietly together, then shook hands, and Bertrand went away, while Hubert descended to the ramparts, and gave orders for women and children and non-combatants to retire behind the next line of fortifications.

Men looked at each other, and fought more doggedly than before.

A strange scene did the July sun shine upon from his vault of cloudless blue. Gunpowder was unknown in that year, and no smoke veiled the horror of the siege. Men swarming like flies across the moat, men dying like flies upon the rocks. Men poised upon tower and ladder in mid-air, men hurtling through space, screaming in the death throe. Men above, shrinking from the seething torrents of boiling pitch and lead and oil, forced up into the hell by those below, men leaping upon the rows of pikes, men shouting and alive, men silent and dead.

Blue for the sky, black for men's hearts, red for men's blood, shed by men.

And still life pressed at death's heel, and the flood of Arnaud's vast army rolled forward upon the doomed town. And still the Biterrois fought like men possessed. Hubert was here and there and everywhere, fighting with the youngest of them. Philippe of Albret went to work quietly after his manner, but the enemy found him deadly, and the tower he held showed no signs yet of the battering it was receiving.

On the ramparts, Etienne of Ronais hacked and slew whomsoever came to his hand with a calm that only the fire in his eyes belied. He was merely filling in his time until he beheld Bishop Foulquet, who had hounded his love to her death. And as he worked, it seemed to him that her gay presence hovered about him, and that her

laugh tinkled ever in his ear—"Life, Etienne, the quick fierce throb of life. Oh, love, you live to-day."

So he heard her, and anguish caught him in the throat, and with a snarl he drove his sword into the breast of a man who had just leaped over the parapet. He sank gurgling on the blood-stained stones, but his fellows were after him, and a stiff fight ensued before the Biterrois swept most of them back and captured the rest. The margin, however, was ominously small between victory and disaster.

D'Albret marked the weak spot and sent reinforcements, but the weakness was appearing at too many points for his liking, the ramparts were congested with too many dead and wounded Biterrois. Unless heaven opened and sent its angelic battalions to their aid, where should men be found to fill the ever-widening gaps?

Simon of Montfort brought all the military knowledge of his day to bear against the heavy door which so stolidly barred the town against him. Heavy rams and huge stones hurled from gigantic mangonels smashed unceasingly against the massive wood, scarring it here and there, slowly but surely shaking its resistance. Then men came with faggots, reeds, branches, and piles of furze. Most were shot down by the Biterrois archers, but enough escaped to throw their burden at the foot of the gate, and in time the heap grew to fair dimensions. Two of the wheeled towers closed upon the gate, burning torches were flung upon the heap. Quick spurts of flame, a crackle running through and through it, a puff of wind and the flames rushed up. Philippe of Albret gave his orders. Immediately a stream of sand and gravel cascaded on to the fire and smothered it. A mass of heavy stones followed, and the danger was

crushed for the moment. The enemy withdrew to mature fresh plans, and Béziers breathed again.

But such respite was brief. After seven hours of continuous effort, the crusaders led by the Count of Nevers forced an entrance into the town. Yells of victory burst from his men. Certain now of success, they pressed forward in wild disorder, bearing down by sheer weight of numbers the Biterrois who opposed them. Count Hubert hurried to the spot, shouted, but no man could hear in the infernal uproar, then perceiving the hopelessness of his efforts, flung himself into the first rank of his struggling men.

As in a flash, he saw the imminent destruction of the town. Then fresh shouts fell upon the air, fierce, savage yells of exultation, and high above the din a great voice calling: "A Crein! A Crein! *Rose et ma mie! Rose et ma mie!* Follow the Red Rose of Crein!"

Bertrand had made a sortie from another gate and swept upon Nevers' rear, followed by three hundred of the bravest knights in Provence.

The Nivernais checked, swung round, and finding their rear enveloped, lost their heads. Success was forgotten in fear. They held to but one thought, and that to sell their lives as dearly as they could.

The fight was sharp and terrible. Sword and axe hacked armor into shreds, and men fought naked, unprotected, interlaced in the fury and lust of death, tearing at each other like wild beasts.

And where the fight raged fiercest, there towered the dominant figure of Bertrand of Crein in his black mail and yellow surcoat, and the three roses glowing deeply red upon his breast. The lust of battle raced through his veins. The shouts and yells, the deep sobbing breaths, as men thrust and parried and hacked and smote with all

the ardor that was in them, burnt through him with the fiery glow of strong wine. Now and again he sang for sheer delight in his strength and the glory of such a fight.

"Red Rose of Crein!" he shouted; "we'll blood it deeper yet!" and he drove at a huge man in copper mail who barred his path. The blow twisted the helmet from the man's head, and Bertrand recognized Rodolphe of Verlay, remembered Bûchon's hunger for this man, and refrained from the second blow.

"Hell waits higher up," he yelled, but the noise drowned his words, and a fresh rush of men swept Verlay aside, all unconscious of Bertrand's identity.

More shouts, this time from the enemy. Count Simon had sent help to Nevers, and a solid body of men were already upon Bertrand's flank. With this force behind him and the Nivernais pouring back upon him from the town, he had nothing left but to cut a way through to the gates or to die there and then.

Three hundred knights had issued from the town. "A few men succeeded in cutting a way back, but these few men were followed, stabbed, and hacked to the very walls of Béziers, and when they entered the gates, the enemy came with them. The Counts of St. Pol, of Montfort, and of Courtenay arrived at the same moment and while the Biterrois were still fighting manfully on three sides of the town, the fourth lay open to the enemy, and Béziers was in the hands of the Church." [1]

The most detailed account of the siege and fall of Béziers comes from the Benedictine monks, who might be supposed partisans of Rome. Yet even they refuse to describe the horrors of which Béziers became the center when the crusaders took possession of her. One writer

[1] Histoire des Comtes de Toulouse. Molinet de Saint-Yon.

says, "In the history of no people has man ever shown himself such an object of horror in the eyes of mankind. The crusaders shut their hearts to every humane feeling, and as if the Spirit of Evil were directing their vengeance, as if they had been transformed into the enemies of God's creation, they slew without mercy every living being in their path. And it was not enough for these pitiless conquerors to immolate all in their fury. The very corpses of their victims were subjected to monstrous desecration."

Those fifteen thousand naked savages called *truands* were first into the town, murdering and looting, wild beasts unchained among a helpless people. Later on, the leaders of the regular soldiery forced them out, and made them disgorge their plunder, but none could undo the work of their hands. Murder and rapine, bloodshed and horror unspeakable they took into Béziers. The town became first a shambles, then a crematorium. Fire shot up on every side. Men's shouts drowned women's screams. The crackle of flames, the crash of falling buildings roared over both.

Thicker and higher rolled the smoke, hanging a black cloud over the doomed city. Louder and louder roared the flames, huge, monstrous tongues of fire licking up through the clouds of smoke, and behind vapor and fire rushed the fierce, cruel beasts of prey, more fierce, more cruel than the fires of hell itself. Behind these men came the Abbot of abbots and Foulquet of Marseilles and Pierre of Vaux-Cernay, and all the archbishops and bishops in their train to bless the work of those who had delivered the enemy into the hands of Holy Church.

When the massacre and the rapine and the pillage and the fire were beginning to destroy Béziers, the chronicle relates that one came to Arnaud of Armouri asking:

"Holy father, how shall the slayers distinguish between the heretics and the true servants of the church?"

And the Abbot of abbots made answer: "Kill them all. God will know His own."

Higher and higher rolled the smoke. At times the density so obscured the flames that it seemed as if they might be extinguished, until suddenly, with a roar, up rushed the scarlet jets of fire again, piercing the heavy vapor and playing in crimson fury against the blue sky. Up and ever up, leaving God alone knew what of screaming horror and tortured silence in its wake, the fire licked up the hill, up, ever up, until it touched the walls of the citadel itself, and with its furnace blast drove the soldiers back upon the palace.

Now, just ahead of the flames went three figures who, by every law of man's limitations, should have lost that race with fiery death, but who, by the unknown power of man's will to accomplish the impossible, reached the palace just as a great wall of flame hurled itself upon the tower, and shut the entrance to them.

"This way then," said one man, who should have been Bertrand of Crein, but was only what hate and rage and blood and fire had made of him, a phantasmagorial horror looming against a background of red flame and black smoke.

"Where?" asked Hubert of Gervaudan, he having likewise suffered the transformation worked by blood-horror upon men's souls.

"St. Nazaire!" said Bertrand, and led the way to the right, but now he half-carried the third figure, who babbled nonsense between parched lips, and staggered like a drunkard, who in times of reason was Gaston of

Nîmes—a very gentle page. The three disappeared in the smoke.

A very few minutes later brought the horde of maddened soldiery to the place where they had stood, and when the fire finally sank for lack of fresh fuel, these savages rushed exultingly into the last stronghold of Béziers.

If they hoped for spoil and prisoners, neither rewarded them. Flames had reduced the palace and everything in it to charred remains, while of human beings there was no sign, not even a blackened corpse to show where life had been. The soldiers looked at each other in bewilderment. Surely people had lodged here, surely here if anywhere men would make a last stand! But the place was deserted. Where had the garrison departed?

Sullenly enough the crusaders stood upon this pinnacle of a former glory, and surveyed the work of their hands. A hill of blackened desolation with a river running red at its base, the acrid smell of smoke poisoning the air, intermittent bursts of smoke and flame where some house still smoldered. Not a building, not a church remained intact. Béziers was a vast heap of smoking ruins beneath which the last horrible gasps of life choked into death amid shouts of triumphant delight, drunken orgies and blasphemous derision.

Nothing remained. Then what was that church tower standing boldly out against the evening sky! No sign of destruction here, although all around were houses burnt beyond recognition. The Church of St. Nazaire, preserved so far as by a miracle.

So far. But here was a matter deserving some inquiry, and the crusaders rolled down upon the church to make it.

When the assault upon the town first began, the women and children, the sick and infirm, the old and the wounded, took refuge beneath the sacred roof of St. Nazaire. Mothers with infants at the breast, women who expected to become mothers, prayed before the high altar, before Mary's shrine, for the safety of their loved ones. The shouting of men, the noise of the fighting reached them in their retreat, and some accused heaven of having extended its protection to them alone, while their beloved perished.

Did heaven hear that cry and answer it? God forbid!

But the crusaders swept down upon St. Nazaire, and there in the sacred precincts, where formerly crime itself found sanctuary, the innocent and defenseless were powerless to disarm the fury of their butchers.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

TEN minutes before Bertrand and Hubert reached the palace, Rosamunde and her women, with Enid and Margot, Bûchon and the garrison, had left it by the path connecting with St. Nazaire, and sought refuge in the church. The soldiers stood by the door to hold it against attack, and Bûchon stood with them, yet never losing sight of Lady Rosamunde, Enid, and the little Margot. And here they waited with those other tortured souls, and what each suffered in dreadful anticipation cannot be realized, and therefore defies description. But they were women then, even as women are women to-day, and all they loved was fighting yonder, and all they feared was coming nearer. Some prayed, some wept, others screamed, others again remained silent, frozen by dread into images of stone.

That which was written came swiftly. Hoarse cries of rage and vengeance from the crusaders against these people who had thought to escape them, answered by women's screams from within, blows upon the heavy door, axes and hammers to splinter its resistance, the crash of its fall, and a wild rush of smoke-grimed, blood-stained, yelling, blasphemous devils into God's sweet sanctuary. They mowed down the soldiers like chaff beneath the scythe and began their work. . . .

Let it be remembered that women formed the largest number of the refugees. And children! Torn from their

mothers' arms, torn unborn from their mothers' wombs to die before they lived. Women and children! In God's Church, with God's priests pealing the tocsin in the belfry to drown the awful screams. Women and children! Children slaughtered before their mothers' eyes, babies wrenched from their mothers' breasts, tossed upon the points of sword and spear. The children! Oh, Mary, Mother of Christ, your Son was once a babe!

Women ran shrieking hither and thither, pursued by merciless beasts. Some died at once, others lived too long. The men, old and infirm, young and wounded, were killed quickly. Children knelt, paralyzed by terror, gazing vacantly into faces that had no pity. Here and there men fought each other to obtain some coveted prize, carried their victims off in triumph, or slew them on the spot to satisfy the blood-lust. And high over the infernal noise clanged and wailed the infernal bell tolled by those priests of Rome.

"Woe, woe, for Provence! Men shall weep blood for their women and children who shall weep no more."

What had Mark the jester prophesied?

The rivers shall run blood! The rivers, perhaps, but not the aisles of God's churches. Mark had not foreseen that. Pools of blood before the high altar where once the priest elevated the Host. Red pools streaming beneath Mary's shrine. And worse than the shedding of blood! Abominations unspeakable, desecration indescribable of women before the image of that Woman who mothered God!

When the church door yielded to the attack and the soldiers were all killed, Bûchon had swept his three charges back into a small recess behind the door, and here for a space they remained unnoticed in the first onward rush. And they saw . . .

Enid took Margot's head against her breast and sank to the earthen floor, shutting her eyes, but Rosamunde stood upright, with the dagger ready to save her from this hell. She, too, would have shut her eyes upon the horror, but the sight must be borne lest the same took her unawares.

Therefore, she endured this torment until eyes refused to see and ears to hear, and a great black cloud of agony and despair overwhelmed her with deadly nausea, and her woman's strength gave way in the moment she needed it most. For two men looking up from devil's work about a little child, saw her standing against the sunshine streaming through a painted window. They marked her beauty, her green silk gown, the jewels in her hair, and they sprang toward her with a yell. Bûchon met them, axe uplifted in his great arms.

"Let be," he said, "the woman is mine."

"When you can keep her," jeered one, and thrust at him with his sword, while the other made to seize Rosamunde, who had sunk upon her knees, too paralyzed by horror to use the dagger in her nerveless hand.

Bûchon brained the first man, and leaving his axe in the cloven skull, flung his arms round the second and tore him from Rosamunde. For a while they swayed together, then the man wrenched himself free, and springing back a pace, stared hard at Bûchon.

"By——!" he shouted, "Bûchon the faggot-hewer. Here shall be meat for Red Rodolphe's fangs. Hi, men of Verlay, *à moi, à moi!*"

Then Bûchon marked what had escaped him in the swift attack. This man wore Verlay's livery, moreover he recognized him now. It was Dricard, Rodolphe's trusted sergeant, he who had slain Drapon, the cloth merchant, and would have tortured himself but for Count

Bertrand. And Dricard recognized Lady Rosamunde, and saw also Enid prone upon the floor with Margot at her side. Here, indeed, were rich prizes for his master's pleasure.

He shouted again, and five men came plunging through the abominations filling St. Nazaire to his help. Bûchon set his teeth, and braced himself to meet what should come. He had a dagger, but his axe was in the skull of the man at his feet, and he dared not stoop. One man against five, and behind him two women and a child to save from the measure of life now rioting through the church.

There came a momentary respite while Dricard instructed his men. Bûchon glanced at Enid and Margot. This woman had said she loved him, and there was the child. But there was also his oath and his debt to Bertrand of Crein. And time lacked for the merciful slaying of all three.

He shook Rosamunde by the shoulder. "Lady," he said, "can you not use your own dagger? Then I might serve Enid and the child."

She understood, and tightened her clasp of the dagger. His next words stung her back to consciousness.

"These are Verlay's men. I can kill some, but more remain."

The personal horror he conjured up killed the impersonal horror born of all she had witnessed, and released her deadened nerves. She stood upright and spoke quite collectedly.

"Serve them well, Bûchon. I can free myself."

Her hand was entirely steady as she turned the dagger point upon her breast. Bûchon knelt over Enid, who had fainted.

Dricard, seeing his spoil about to escape him, dashed

forward with his men, but before he could reach them, before Rosamunde could press the blade home, or Bûchon drive his into Enid's heart, a grim, black figure whirled out of the chaos heaving all round, and hurled himself in Dricard's path, cutting and thrusting with his long sword like a madman.

Rosamunde knew him at once. Her thoughts flew back to the fight with the *routiers,* and to the black and crimson horror of Alfor the monk as she had seen him then.

So she saw him again, fighting now as then to save her. Ay, but to save her for what? Yet here was a brief resting-place on the road to death. Let her watch a little, never moving the dagger's point from her soft breast.

She saw Verlay's men shrink from that maniacal attack, saw Bûchon wrench his axe free, saw the two fight side by side—not like men, but like very giants in strength and fury. Dricard was down, never to move again in this world; two more fell, sobbing horribly, but others had marked the struggle, and came hurrying up. Their own work was done. Shrieks and screams had sunk to silence. The butchery was accomplished. No further need for the tolling bell, and the priests ceased their work. Now the strife at the church door roused men to fresh eagerness. They formed a semi-circle round Bûchon, Alfor, and the two women—one lying prone with her arm flung across a shuddering child, the other standing erect, so still, so frozen in her agony, that she might have been a figure carved in marble. The wall of the church flanked them, and Bûchon and Alfor fought this way and that to protect them. They hacked, they thrust, they guarded and attacked with a rapidity and deadliness that amazed their enemies, yet

they had no ultimate chance against overwhelming numbers, and Lady Rosamunde never moved her dagger.

Enid was stirring now, moaned, opened her eyes, and struggled to her knees. Margot seemed unconscious. A wolfish gleam shot into the mother's face, and leaning forward, she snatched the dagger from the breast of a man who lay dead beside her.

"Don't fear now, my chick," she muttered. "Mother can kill you with fewer pangs than she bore you."

And with the deliberation of one crazed beyond fear, she turned Margot on her back, and tore the dress from the little breast.

"Over the heart, sweet chick. Wait for mother now."

Then before the blow could fall, the church wall behind Rosamunde seemed to open, a draught of sweet air rushed upon the blood-hung atmosphere of that shambles, and through the opening came a man in black armor, who shouted, "*Rose et ma mie!*" and behind him came another man and a boy.

The first man stopped dead at sight of her he sought, but had not hoped to find so soon—if at all. Then a great light flamed across his face as he grasped the situation.

"Keep them off, Bûchon!" roared Bertrand. "Only a minute, man. Now, Rose of the World——"

He caught her in his arms, and swung her through the doorway into the cloisters beyond. Count Hubert dragged Enid, and Gaston carried Margot, then Bûchon and Alfor staggered out, and after them came the men of Verlay and their fellows. And as they came, Bertrand of Crein and Hubert of Gervaudan, with Bûchon the faggot-hewer and Alfor the monk, stood on either side of the door and smote men down until the dead bodies filled the way, and those who were behind could not

pass over that barricade. But they ran through the great door, and came upon them from the front, yet not too easily. For the cloister arches hindered the attack, and four desperate men and a gallant boy stood between their women and the wolves who would have torn them.

The sun was sinking now, and Rosamunde saw Bertrand in a glow of crimson light. It reddened his armor, dyed the red roses deeper still, made of her ducat a splash of ruddy flame just over his heart. No thought for her husband now. Bertrand was her heart's mate, fighting for her. Almost she forgot to be afraid. She gloried in his strength, she exulted in his skill. All that was savage woman in her rose to meet the savage in him that was protecting her. His helmet had gone long ago and his face shone clearly in her sight. She loved him in his dirt and blood and rage and cruelty. The blood-lust burning red in his eyes sent her own blood racing through her veins. Her courage leaped to his, and although she did not know it, she was clutching her dagger with a laugh upon her mouth.

Then, while that fierce smile still parted her red lips, a man leaped forward and drove his sword beneath Count Hubert's guard. A straight thrust, a good thrust. Hubert threw out his arms, spun round and dropped dead at her feet so quickly that she found herself still laughing down into his dead face.

Thus died Hubert of Gervaudan as simply, as quietly and as nobly as he had lived. No flourish of trumpets, no flaming drama played out before men's admiring eyes. An obscure death in an obscure hole in a vain endeavor.

Vain, because as Rosamunde fell to her knees beside him, a new band of men rushed into the cloisters, and at their head came none other than the great Simon de Montfort himself. His eagle eyes devoured the scene,

the open door of the church, the bodies, dead and dying, heaped before it, the lady kneeling beside a prone figure, a man swaying on his knees beside her, one hand clutching at her gown, another woman laughing foolishly over a maddened child, and two men and a boy hacking, thrusting, hewing at a crowd of other men, snarling for the prey denied them.

All this did Simon de Montfort perceive, saw, also, the red roses embroidered on the men's surcoats, knew the black mail of the knight, knew Bertrand of Crein, and coming swiftly over the cloister grass struck back the lambs of Rome. And when they yelled their execration he whipped off his helmet, saying no word, but smiling in a very awful fashion as they slunk away before his might.

Then he turned his dreadful face upon Bertrand, who showed a face equally dreadful, for these two men had been in hell, had not even yet escaped, and what both had seen and done that day scarred their faces until their lives' end.

And Simon de Montfort, who had opened this damnation upon Béziers, and Bertrand of Crein, who had lived through it, stared into each other's eyes and smiled, drunk with the lust of blood.

"If I kill you," said Bertrand thickly, for indeed words come slowly to men in such a hell, "I will also kill the woman and the child. Your men shall not harm them."

De Montfort called an officer of his troop and spoke to him. This gentleman, whose armor dripped blood, saluted and retired.

"It is agreed," said Count Simon.

"If you kill me," said Bertrand, "you shall spare the lady, who is cousin to Aquitaine, and her woman and the child. And you shall spare my page, son to the

Count of Nîmes, and my henchman, a very faithful servant. This you shall do in recompense for the fight I am going to give you."

"This will I do," agreed Simon de Montfort, "in the name of God and my dear wife, amen." Then, because Bertrand had no helmet, he threw his own aside and gave an order. The soldiers drew back, leaving a clear space round the two men. Bûchon leaned upon his axe in the guard of two soldiers. The officer in the dripping armor closed with four men round Rosamunde and Enid and Margot, who seemed in a state of coma, and gave no heed to what was happening. Gaston stood beside Bûchon. Gentle page and rough faggot-hewer, who had both shared so many dangers with their lord, now watched together this fight—perhaps his last—in which neither might help him.

And as the sun dropped gently toward the sea, Simon de Montfort and Bertrand of Crein fought as men did fight in those days, for country, love, and honor. Great men they were in medieval years, great in their sins, their cruelty, their courage. Great hearts and great arms, great strength and great endurance. Doggedly these two fought, cheerfully, delighting in the rapture of noble thrusts, given and received. Men held their breath, watching those mighty strokes, those great sweeps of the heavy swords from shoulder to shoulder. De Montfort was the bigger man, yet Bertrand had a greater agility; moreover, he was younger, and yet again he fought for the woman he loved, and the country he would avenge. And gradually, as he fought, he hummed between his lips, spasmodically at first, then continuously, louder and yet louder, until the men watching caught the sound and stared at each other amazed. Even words reached them, a chant of clashing weapons, an exulta-

tion of fighting, a very hymn of praise to the rapture of war and the spilling of blood.

The soldiers muttered uneasily between themselves. All Europe knew the fame of Bertrand de Born, who never fought without a song on his lips, and most of the men knew Bertrand of Crein by repute, knew him to have learnt his warfare from the great troubadour warrior, had heard the legend which told how that great warrior's spirit lived again in this knight of Crein. Horror and exhaustion born of fiendish crimes committed had shaken their spirits. Now superstition rushed in upon them. They fell back, crowding upon each other to put a greater distance between them and this strange singing knight.

Did De Montfort in some subtle, psychical fashion receive the taint of their fear! Did his own superstitious spirit recoil before that flow of words pouring, as it seemed, unconsciously from the grim, hungry mouth of the man who beset him. May be, may be not, but whatever the reason, his skill deserted him. Only momentarily, but long enough to set his foot slipping on the dew-laden grass and bring him to his knees before Bertrand.

"Ah!" said Bertrand, and paused in his song, then lifted his sword and shouted like a madman: "*Mieux vaut un mort qu'un vivant vaincu,*" and would have driven home before Count Simon could rise. But at that moment fresh shouts arose, a lane opened through the crowd and down it came the glory of the Church and the might of her arm.

Her guards rushed between Bertrand and the prostrate count, beat back the eager crowd and kept a space clear on the cloister lawn.

And in this space, standing beneath the blue of God's

sky, with their feet upon the cool green of His sweet earth, were the Abbot of abbots, Foulquet, Bishop of Toulouse, the Archbishops of Sens, of Bordeaux, of Bayonne, and of many other towns, and with them the Dukes of Burgundy and of Aquitaine, the Count of Nevers, Rodolphe of Verlay and Guy of Beaufoy.

These were the conquerors of Béziers. The last remnant of the conquered faced them. Bertrand of Crein, quiet now, standing free yet ringed round by his captors, Bûchon beside him, both men bleeding from wounds, grimed with dust and sweat, bloodshot eyes glaring from reddened lids. Dangerous men even in captivity. And Bûchon had seen Rodolphe of Verlay. To the left Rosamunde of Gervaudan knelt over her dead husband, while by her side lay Alfor the monk, not yet dead but dying, with one hand gripping a fold of her green silk gown. And beyond them stood Enid, laughing foolishly, and Margot sobbing in Gaston's arms.

Arnaud of Armouri looked from Bertrand to the men he and his had slain, and a fine, cruel smile twisted his lips.

"Have you had your fill of fighting?" asked he.

"Not while a priest remains alive," said Bertrand, breathing quickly.

Then Foulquet thrust himself forward and his face shone with triumph.

"Gomorrha and the Dead Sea, Bertrand of Crein! What did I promise you long ago?"

"Less than you have given, Foulquet. Go into the church"—his breath came in deep, fierce sobs—"you devils who serve the Devil, go into the church and see the work of your hands."

Arnaud waved Foulquet back.

"Peace, good bishop. Are not all heretics damned?

Count Bertrand, you are Rome's prisoner, and shall answer presently for the murder of that saintly legate, Pierre of Castelnau. Lady Rosamunde of Gervaudan, you, also, are held captive. Where is the count, your husband?"

She rose to her feet then, and pointed to the dead man. The fire had left her eyes. She looked haggard, spent with agony.

"My lord abbot, I think he has taken a message to heaven," she said slowly and clearly. "The little children could not make God hear."

She stared about her wildly, then staggered and reeled into Bertrand's arms. Simon de Montfort, bleeding about the head and breathing heavily, stepped forward between them and the abbot's soldiers. So Bertrand held her upon his breast and at her feet lay Alfor, still clutching her dress.

De Montfort turned to meet Arnaud's menace.

"My lord abbot, there is a promise between this gentleman and me. And this lady is kinswoman to the Count of Aquitaine."

Now Béziers was a charnelhouse full of gallant knights. Rome could afford to let this one go. Moreover, Arnaud saw plainly that Burgundy and Nevers and Beaufoy were against further tyranny. They seemed glutted with death—even nauseated. And Aquitaine took a high tone in the matter.

"The Lady of Gervaudan is a princess of Aquitaine," said he haughtily. "What talk is this of prisoners?"

Arnaud, who had no shadow of claim against her, deemed it wiser to forego his private vengeance in the face of such powerful opposition.

"You shall be responsible for your kinswoman, my lord. But the man is mine."

"No," said De Montfort, "he is no man's, seeing that he overcame me. Yet no other here can claim him from me until our account is settled."

"When and where you please," said Bertrand.

"When the fortune of war brings us together again, refreshed," answered Simon.

"Will you let him go?" cried Arnaud. "Rome claims him of you."

"I can make good her loss."

The great man looked round upon the picture of which he himself was the dominant figure. The gray church, the green grass, women's stone-white faces, men's faces distorted by passions, grimed and stained with blood, the weary noblemen leaning upon their swords, the eager churchmen not yet glutted with slaughter. The rays of the setting sun flamed upon them, turning the men's armor into the appearance of sheaths of molten flame, and cast a veritable halo of glory about the tragedy of St. Nazaire.

"My lords," cried Simon de Montfort, "shall I tell you why this gentleman must go free! It is because I, Simon de Montfort, am afraid that if I bind him, men will say: 'He chained him because he feared the man who fears nothing.' *'Crein ne rien crain.'* A heavy boast, sirs, but Count Bertrand bears it lightly. I myself saw him brave King Philippe with words I had not dared to speak. What say you gentlemen to his sword flashing before the king's eyes, and his promise of another hundred thousand swords to meet the king's threat? A need of courage there, I think. And which of you have not seen him fight to-day! Those who have not, look yonder," and he swung back, pointing to the dead and dying piled round the church door. "Three men and a boy held fifty men at bay," cried the deep voice, "and when

two were down, the third fought on alone, and when I came, this same man asked nothing better than to fight me, and fought with a song on his lips and beat me, Simon de Montfort, to my knees. Such is Count Bertrand of Crein, whom the Church will burn for a crime he never committed. Ay, Lord Abbot of Armouri, you know the truth as well as I." Again he faced the great northern barons. "Gentlemen, it were a stain upon the valor of France did we rob her of the chance to prove herself against the greatest soldier in Provence. I say he shall go free to give us the hope of yet slaying him in noble warfare. Such as he are not killed like rats in a trap."

"*Par la mort Dieu,* no," swore Burgundy, while Guy of Beaufoy took Bertrand's hand and Nevers and Aquitaine laid their service at Lady Rosamunde's feet. Only Rodolphe of Verlay hung back, staring at Bûchon and muttering to Bishop Foulquet.

The abbot looked about him, found no support from these northern lords, and yielded to necessity.

"You will answer to the Holy Father, my lord count."

"Rome must pay her fighting men," was the significant answer, and Arnaud turned away with a black face. But Foulquet was not minded to let his enemy escape so easily.

"Heretic and murderer is Bertrand of Crein," he cried.

"Thief, also," boomed a great voice, and Rodolphe of Verlay stepped forward, pointing at Bûchon. "He stole my serf."

"Will you fight for him?" said Bertrand over Rosamunde's head. "Can you stand alone, dear heart?" he whispered. "There is work to do."

Work indeed, but not for him. As Rodolphe of Verlay came near, Bûchon, standing so dull and quiet up to

now, flung himself forward, and leaped upon his enemy.

"Did you take my wife, Verlay?" said he, and twisted Verlay's dagger from his breast, and drove it deep into the thick neck before the big red man could realize what was happening. He sank to the ground, dragging Bûchon with him, and knew his slayer.

"You killed my wife," said Bûchon, "now you are killed by a common dog. Take that memory to hell."

Verlay gurgled, plucked a second dagger from his girdle and struck upward. Then he died, and Bûchon crumpled up beside him.

Men ran forward, but Bertrand reached him first and waved them back.

"Your justice is not needed here," said he. Then to Bûchon: "How is it with you, friend?"

"Well," gasped Bûchon, "very well. Heaven lies south of the Loire, lord."

A great peace was on his face. The heavy, sullen look of old had yielded to an expression of perfect content.

"I can rest now, lord. Where is Enid?"

Bertrand called to her. She came forward, still smiling, crazed by fear, and stared vacantly at Bûchon. All around stood the soldiers, with Arnaud and his archbishops and the great lords, watching them. Rosamunde was behind Bertrand, and behind her, unheeded, Alfor the monk lay dead, with a shred of green silk in his clenched hand.

"Enid," said Bûchon, "it's paradise or hell for me."

The words pierced her clouded brain, and steadied unbalanced reason, but they, also, completed the work of terror. Some among those watching declared afterward that they knew the moment when her heart broke. She dropped to her knees beside him.

"Wait for me, Bûchon—my man——"

"Ay," he muttered. "You're a good lass. I always liked you, but the wife called me, and little Blanche——"

"I know, but they'll understand and not grudge me—this——"

Her head drooped on to his breast. He put his arm feebly about her.

"There, lass, there. The wimple suits you vastly."

His voice trailed into silence. And neither spoke nor moved again.

Night fell, soft, compassionate, veiling the horror left by day. The moon rose. Cold and placid, she smiled across the sky, nor hid her face before the black ruin revealed to her gaze. So hard, so pitiless her face, as of one whose business was not to judge but to illumine life in its good and evil. Her beams gilded the smoking desolation, lit the ghastly silence, brought into merciless radiance the work of death and abomination. Here they whitened the terror in a woman's staring eyes, there sought to pierce the mass of men lying before the main gate, glided over rocks beneath whose weight lay mangled limbs, fell upon Philippe of Albret dead at the head of his soldiers, as became a most gallant knight. Higher up, in the garden of the charred palace, the moonlight ran here and there between the shadows, as if seeking some one or some thing, paused before the shade of rose bushes, darted forward as a breath of wind opened a path, and danced over the dead face of Etienne of Ronais, lying upon Yvonne's grave. How, being mortally wounded, he had come through the fire to this resting-place, is known to himself alone. Certain it is that Bishop Foulquet escaped him to live in infamy undying through the future betrayal of Toulouse.

Thus is the tale of Béziers told, not exaggerated, in the atmosphere of death.

"On the 21st of July, 1209, Béziers was a town, large, rich, well populated, flourishing. Of her it was said: 'If God wished to dwell on earth, He would dwell in Béziers!' Twenty-four hours later Béziers had ceased to exist, and her population belonged no more to this world."

Between twenty-five and thirty thousand people were slaughtered by the soldiers fighting for Rome in her effort to bring wandering sheep back to her fold.

CHAPTER XXXIX

SIMON OF MONTFORT held Bertrand against the Church, and while the invading army moved before Carcassonne, Bertrand rode to Crein with Rosamunde and Gaston and little Margot. He was pledged not to fight again until he had paid his ransom, but Guy of Beaufoy stood surety for the money, and Bertrand was free to collect it with all haste and once more carry his roses into the service of Provence.

Rosamunde and Margot found shelter with Adelaide, widow lady of Beaucaire, whose son was among the slain at Béziers, and whose castle stood a short three miles from Crein. Here the two women bided, one widowed in all that life held dear, the other twice widowed, yet, for the first time in life, a bride—of hope.

Day after day toiled Bertrand, raising men from the country side, drilling them in the use of weapons, fanning their zeal with the burning breath of his own. From all parts they flocked to him, grim, gaunt specters of famine and woe. Dreadful stories they told of sack and pillage and rape and fire. Themselves were but the jetsam of the storm which had swept over their world. Anguish, rage, hatred, lust of revenge. Good material here for Bertrand to work upon. And when he had got his strength in working order, he exercised it in sweeping down upon such enemies as he could find. Was there not a ransom to pay? And who had richer coffers than

the monasteries, or traveled more heavily laden with earthly vanities than the clergy!

North, south, east, and west, he swooped like an avenging hawk. The crusaders, settled before Carcassonne, left the country behind open to his ravaging. Grimly he worked, merciless to all of that party which had burnt the shambles of Béziers in an ineffaceable image upon his brain. Rich spoil he took from this church and that, jewels and vessels wrought in precious metal from the frightened prelates he harried on the roads. His name became a scourge, the terror of him shook every priest who found himself within the precincts he haunted. He stormed two Cluniac monasteries, killed every monk who had not run away, fired what he left behind him, and returned to Crein, whence he despatched his ransom to Simon de Montfort a month after Carcassonne fell into the great soldier's hands.

Fugitives brought the story of the siege, of the failure of the water supply and of the pestilence which drove Roger of Béziers to sacrifice himself to save his people. They were only spared on condition of his personal surrender, and thus he became prisoner to De Montfort, who also took possession of his lands. Four months later the young viscount, one of the most gallant and perfect figures in French history, was murdered in his prison by the men who had already robbed him of his liberty and wealth.

But this lay in the future, which was also to see Bertrand of Crein carry his roses far and wide in the service of Provence; to see him, together with the Counts of Foix, of Béarn and of Comminges, force De Montfort to raise the siege of Toulouse. The future should, moreover, find Count Raymond throwing off the yoke of terror and fighting again for his own, should hold Simon de

Montfort's death before the walls of Toulouse, should ultimately win back Provence for Raymond's son before the course of events finally united her to France forever.

So much for the future. Now what of the present!

During all the days of his hard endeavor Bertrand had yet found time to visit Beaucaire and spend some hours every week in the company of his dear lady. Each had great need of the other. Shaken as Bertrand was to the depths of his being by hate and thirst for revenge, her gentleness alone saved him from becoming a slave to both. And she in her weakness, with reason almost tottering in the grip of awful memories, found no comfort save in his strength. She leaned upon it and with his arms round her, found new courage with which to endue her life.

Long and long they talked together, pacing the terrace of Beaucaire Castle. The names of Bûchon and Enid were often on their lips, with grief in their hearts for the faithful service now lost forever.

"I won a man indeed from Verlay," said Bertrand, musing. "I have not found his like since, nor shall."

"Margot is my care now," said Rosamunde. "I have given the child her freedom." The eyes of both travelled to where Gaston and the little maid played beneath the trees. Thank God for the power of youth to forget. Already the horror of Béziers was fading from their minds, and Margot could sleep at night without calling piteously on her mother's name. Now she clung to Gaston's hand, laughing and chattering, and the boy was twining flowers in her golden curls.

"When the time comes," said Rosamunde softly, "she shall not go empty-handed to her husband."

Bertrand laughed. "Will you marry them already, poor babes!" Then he looked at her with quizzical glance.

"Gaston of Nîmes and the daughter of your tire-woman!"

She flushed, then paled. "Ungenerous," she whispered, but he caught her to his breast with a little cry of triumph.

"Oh, Queen of me, do you never remember the scullion's son!"

"Nor scullion's son, nor nobleman of Provence," she panted.

Lower he bent his head to hers and laid his cheek against her face.

"Who, then, *ma mie,* who then?"

"The man I love," breathed Rosamunde against his lips.

And at last, on the day that saw Bertrand's ransom sent to Count Simon, he came to her again in the garden at Beaucaire and asked her to marry him before once again he went out to fight.

"Hubert gave you into my keeping," he said, taking her in his arms and gazing down at the rare sweet face. "Oh, Rose of my world, the garden of Crein is a desert until this most perfect flower shall bloom in it for my delight."

Two days later they were married in the chapel of Beaucaire by Lady Adelaide's own chaplain. A good man this, and a worthy Christian, who, while deploring Rome's excesses, held stoutly to her infallibility and looked upon Bertrand of Crein as a devil incarnate. None the less he obeyed his lady's injunctions with alacrity. Fear, perhaps, of Bertrand and certainly a liking for Rosamunde helped him to give cheerful assistance in the simple preparations for the ceremony.

Guests there were none. How should guests come from the blackened desolation of Provence? Where now

the lovely Ermengarde of Narbonne, the yellow-haired lady of Foix, the dark beauty of Gisor, all the jewels of wit and loveliness that had gemmed Raymond's court? Scattered like the spent roses of a dead summer.

No gorgeous pageant of gold and silver, no blare of trumpets, no glitter of silks and satins, or blaze of jewels. None of these, nor had Rosamunde or Bertrand the heart to wish them. But instead of splendor, a more precious simplicity, and instead of silken canopies in a great cathedral, a bower of roses in an exquisite chapel.

For this day at least, Adelaide of Beaucaire put aside sorrow, and with Margot's help smothered the chapel in roses. Crimson and yellow, pink and cream, snow-white, blush-red, the fragrant beauties hung round the pillars, twined in the chancel rails, even gleamed upon the altar itself, where the priest stood, book in hand.

Such people as remained in the village, women and children mostly, and the few retainers left in the castle were gathered on the terrace outside waiting for the bridegroom's arrival. Presently he came, mounted, as of old, on Black King, sweeping over the drawbridge into the courtyard at the head of fifty men. All wore new liveries of black and yellow, three roses blazoned on their breasts and every man of them with a rose nodding on his helmet. And Gaston of Nimes shone bravely in the sunshine, with a jewel holding his rose to his velvet cap, and a great white plume sweeping to his shoulder. He would not have changed places with any one in the world at the moment when he dismounted and held his dear lord's stirrup.

Then Bertrand, Count of Crein, leaped swiftly to the ground and, cap in hand, acknowledged the shouts which greeted him. To these people he was a savior, a tower of strength; more, an emblem of that courage and sac-

rifice which alone could save Provence. Small wonder that they shouted themselves hoarse, as he stood there, with the light falling on his strong forceful face, and a smile dancing in his blue eyes, not hard to-day, but softly bright, the eyes of a man who finds heaven to his hand. Tall and lithe in his tunic of black and yellow satin with her ducat glittering beneath his roses, and a golden baldrick to carry the proud device, "*Crein ne rien crain*," blazoned in rubies. He had proved the boast. No man living had a better claim to it. He passed smiling into the chapel, followed by the people, who ranged themselves at the lower end. Gaston took his place beside his master, and then, very soon, the inner door leading directly into the castle opened, and Lady Adelaide appeared, leading Rosamunde by the hand. Behind them came Margot all in white, with a rose wreath on her curls, and an anxious glance demanding Gaston's approval of her finery.

What makes the beauty of women? Glory of hair, perfection of feature, of skin, of form! All these, perhaps, but something more to achieve the miracle Rosamunde of Gervaudan brought into the chapel of Beaucaire, setting the eyes of all who beheld her wide with an amazement that was tinged with awe. For the glory of love shed its radiance about her and shone, as it were, like a white fire burning outward from the rapture of her soul to its expression in her eyes and in her face. A white face gleaming between the loosened masses of dusky hair, as purely perfect as the loveliest white rose in that chapel, two eyes like softly shining stars, two lips as crimson as the roses flaunting on her lover's breast. A clinging robe of yellow tissue molding her slight, lissom figure, the white purity of her bare neck and arms unbroken by any jewels, and a bunch of roses in her hand.

Thus she came to his side and there, before the altar of this small chapel, Rosamunde of Gervaudan and Bertrand of Crein were married.

When the brief ceremony was over, when they had eaten the simple wedding feast that Adelaide of Beaucaire set in their honor, when they had thanked her for her courtesy, they bade her farewell, and she went back into her kingdom of grief, while they rode toward Crein and the kingdom of delight. Reaching it as the moon rose into the quiet summer sky, they passed into the garden to watch her, as they had watched her so often when they rode from Paris.

What was in their hearts then? Each held its own secret joy—neither exactly like the other, yet both fusing into a very perfect union. And all around them nodded roses—the roses of Crein. Bertrand picked one, a glowing crimson beauty and laid it upon her breast.

"Rose of fulfilled desire," he said unsteadily, "a Crein for love, a Crein for war, a Crein for success, and a Crein to hold all three—as I hold you."

His arms were round her. He felt her trembling against him. She took his hand and laid it upon her heart.

"Be merciful, dear love," she whispered. "Can joy be such sweet pain?"

Their lips met, clung to each other.

"Never move your lips from mine," she murmured. "Speak my name."

He breathed rather than spoke it—a sigh with scarce room to live between their lips.

Dusk fell rapidly. Shadows filled the garden. Luna still hung low in the darkening sky. The soft breeze rippled the leaves to elusive speech. On such a night might spirits of dead lovers walk and tell their love

again. Rosamunde moved in her husband's arms. He let her bend from him, but did not loose her. Neither did he speak, content to watch the white loveliness of her with his bright, hard eyes.

"Are the shadows alive?" she said very softly. "Do spirits move about us?" All the pent-up hunger of her womanhood waved across her face.

"Bertrand!"

"Rosamunde!"

"I—I, too, would be a spirit to melt my very essence into yours."

And she clung to him with little fierce, trembling hands, and he laughed and lifted her in his arms against his heart, just over the motto on the baldrick.

"*Je maintiens,*" said Bertrand of Crein.

They supped with Gaston and Margot, and when the simple feast was ended Rosamunde went away to the chamber prepared for this her wedding night. There Bertrand found her. The garish light of the tapers had been extinguished, and she stood white and wonderful in the moonlight which streamed in through the window. Wonderful, but cold? Where now the fire of the woman who would have merged her being into his? Unless indeed that was a greater depth than passion welling in her eyes.

He stood apart, looking at her, and she at him, both silent. In all the world but one man for one woman—one woman for one man. And these two had come together over the fiery path of sacrifice.

"I had so much more to give. Myself unspotted, for your greater gain."

The light in her eyes found reflection in his now.

"You would have had my body, but a withered soul.

Now body and soul I give, both clean and strong, into your keeping."

And Bertrand bowed his head and gave dumb thanks for the lesson which had revealed this fuller joy. His fierce, selfish love had stirred her sleeping heart to a passion as quick and fierce as his, yet she had risen above love's dross, and in her strength had lifted both to a paradise that very few may enter.

There is a soul-passion which, as the heavens are higher than the earth, is higher than the sense-passion. The last serves love. The first sweeps a man and a woman into that realm where they cease loving to become one with Love itself.

Soul to soul were Bertrand of Crein and Rosamunde his wife. One life, one love, one soul. *God keep them in their paradise.*

(1)

THE END.